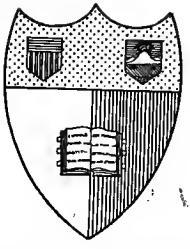

ELIZABETH INCHBALD
AND HER CIRCLE

By the same Author

THE STORY OF PIERROT

THE FAIRIES HERE AND NOW

THE STORY OF SANTA CLAUS

ETC. ETC.

ELIZABETH INCHBALD AND HER CIRCLE

THE LIFE STORY OF A CHARMING WOMAN (1753-1821)

BY S. R. LITTLEWOOD. PUBLISHED IN LONDON BY DANIEL O'CONNOR, 90 GREAT RUSSELL STREET, W.C. 1. 1921

PREFACE

IN Mrs Inchbald's life-story I have made no attempt at a minute record. It seemed inappropriate and unnecessary. She has interested me as the real-life heroine of a real-life novel, yielding innumerable sidelights upon the age in which she lived. If I have failed to convey that interest in this little book, the fault is entirely mine.

I have used James Boaden's *Memoirs* freely. Boaden had so much more opportunity than he seized—in his access to Mrs Inchbald's own papers—that his very omissions have an enhanced charm. I gladly acknowledge the valued help received from my old friend and colleague, Mr Henry Chance Newton, and the loan of many plays and books from his invaluable collection.

S. R. L.

LONDON, *April* 1921.

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late Miss Betham-Edwards—a Suffolk farmer's daughter, with no more education than what she could pick up in her mother's home. This was at the tiny village of Standingfield, or Stanningfield, a little over five miles from Bury St Edmunds, where Elizabeth was born on the 15th of October 1753.

She was the youngest but one of the nine children—seven daughters and two sons—of John and Mary Simpson, her mother's maiden name being Rushbrook. The Simpsons had only a small farm, but appear to have been highly respected. They were Roman Catholics, like many of their neighbours, and on excellent terms with the surrounding Catholic gentry—indeed, the Duchess of Norfolk herself took the trouble to write a long and tenderly expressed letter upon the death of one of Mrs Simpson's daughters-in-law.

At no time does the farm appear to have been particularly prosperous, and Elizabeth was only eight years old when her father died. Mrs Simpson struggled on bravely. In spite of perpetual difficulties, it is quite evident that the old home at Standingfield was not by any means a dreary place. The family had a very large circle of visitors. Elizabeth's own diary, which she kept assiduously for fifty years, but most of which she herself destroyed, is known to have given the names of at least a hundred habitual callers, among them some of the principal families of the county. Possibly this may have been due to the fact that the Roman Catholic families naturally mixed with each other in a way that did much to break through slight differences of social status. Bury St Edmunds was, of course, the Simpsons' post-town, from which they had letters every day. Bury Fair and the little Bury Theatre—a tiny "gaff" lit, like larger ones then, with tallow candles—afforded a fairyland of delight to the childhood of the clever and already beautiful girl, who, from her very earliest years, seems to have nursed in herself a temperament of adventure.

So far as is known, Elizabeth had no education whatever away from home. She herself wrote, in later life: "It is astonishing how much all girls are inclined to literature to what boys are. My brother went to school seven years, and never could spell. I and two of my sisters, though we never were taught, could spell from our infancy." The girls were all of them local beauties, Elizabeth particularly so. But there was

one trouble which, from her earliest childhood, proved a terrible drawback to a disposition that was naturally nothing if not social—namely, a very pronounced stammer. This drove her often into a solitude which she would never otherwise have wished for. On the other hand, it may, perhaps, have had its advantages. It made her all the fonder of the books with which the household seems to have been plentifully supplied. She read everything that she came across. In this way she laid the foundations of a literary craftsmanship that seems to have come to her without any effort, and was the source not only of her fame, but of infinite consolation to her many lonely hours.

Right from the first—as might have been expected with a lively family, buried in the country, and with no deterrent such as the Methodism which was very prevalent just then around them—the theatre, alike in dream and in reality, haunted the imagination not only of Elizabeth, but of her brothers and sisters, and, indeed, of the whole family. Mrs Simpson herself was a constant attendant, with her daughters, at the little Bury theatre. More attractive still were the occasional gala-day visits to a more important playhouse—the famous old theatre at Norwich, then under the management of a certain Richard Griffith. This personage appears to have been his own chief actor, and was, in any case, the god of Elizabeth's earliest idolatry.

How long she had worshipped and wondered from afar, we do not know. Probably her elder brother George, who used to bring back glowing accounts of his visits to the Norwich theatre, and was the first of the family to go upon the stage, was the original ambassador. We find the first definite overtures on her part in a letter written in her eighteenth year to Griffith himself, whom she had not yet met. When she was a child of twelve, she had declared that "she would rather die than live any longer without seeing the world." Even with such a determination, the least wise means that an unknown girl with an unintelligible stammer could well have chosen would seem to have been the stage! Elizabeth, none the less, had prepared herself patiently and persistently for this remote possibility. She had found that passages of declamation, such as her brother George indulged in when he came home from his excursions to Norwich, were much easier for her than tea-table

talk. So she taught herself elocution with the help of the turgid rhetoric then in vogue upon the stage. By writing out every word over which she came to grief, and mastering it, she managed to fit herself for what was ultimately a more or less creditable career as an actress, although she never lost her impediment in ordinary conversation.

All this was in secret. Still, the fact that her brother George became an actor in the same year as that of her first missive to the redoubtable Griffith suggests that he, at any rate, was in the know. Whether her younger sister, Deborah, still at home, was also a conspiratress, is doubtful. It seems, in any case, almost certain that Elizabeth did not ask counsel, or, if she did, obtain the consent, of her mother. Another brother, Edward, lived close by with his wife; two of her sisters, Ann and Dorothy, had married brothers, Mr John and Mr James Hunt (the former already settled in London); and three others had changed the name of Simpson respectively for Huggins, Bigsby, and Slender. Elizabeth's letter to Griffith is not preserved; but his reply is, and it is worth giving, as being astonishing alike in its courtesy and in its encouragement.

> "Madame," he writes, "I was just now favoured with yours—the purpose of which, depend upon it, shall be an entire secret. From some treaties which I have now depending with different performers, and some proposals given under my hand, until I have received answers to them, I cannot say it is in my power, as much as it is in my inclination, to oblige you. If it should, be assured I shall be happy to do it. When you come to town, I should be glad to see and speak with you on this subject. In the mean time I am, Madame, your very humble servant, RICHARD GRIFFITH."

It is quite evident that Elizabeth lost no time in improving upon her distant acquaintance with so polite a letter-writer. Not only so: courtesy in him must have prompted before long in her something that could only coldly be described as cordiality. At the end of her pocket-book for that year was to be found in detached, printed characters the following legend:—

> "R.I.C.H.A.R.D G.R.I.F.F.I.T.H.
> Each dear letter of thy name is harmony."

This was only an early proof of the intensely susceptible nature of our heroine. She generally had the faculty, too—whether fortunate or unfortunate in her case it is difficult to say,—of inspiring these tendernesses fully as often as she experienced them, if not more so. Anyhow, Griffith, of whom practically nothing else is known, was ensconced henceforward for some years in a very sacred corner of Elizabeth's heart. But from the practical point of view, nothing very definite seems to have resulted at that time. Possibly, George, who was at best a poor actor, and probably, like Moses Primrose, not altogether representative of the talents of the family, had proved hardly the best advance agent. Elizabeth's ambitions cannot, however, have remained secret for very long after this, for George's open admission into the ranks of "the profession" in the spring of that year was both prelude and consequence to something very like full-dress family-readings in the drama, which became a great institution in the Standingfield household.

After George definitely pronounced himself an actor, he left home, but corresponded affectionately and regularly with the family. He married an actress, and seems to have encouraged his brilliant younger sister more and more in her aims. She wrote out the parts of Hermione, Cordelia, and other favourite heroines in Shakespeare and the "legitimate." The fact that Mrs Simpson and both her unmarried daughters, when staying with relations at Bury, used to be accepted guests not only at the evening performances at the little theatre, but at the rehearsals in the morning as well, shows that, for all the parade of "secrecy," there was no general objection to the stage (as yet) on the part of the worthy farmer's widow. The Simpsons seem to have been on excellent terms with quite a number of the humble theatrical folk of Bury, including particularly a Mr Richard Wilson, who was to prove later on a very faithful friend to Elizabeth. On her side, be it said, there was towards him none of the romantic attachment that she felt towards Griffith. None the less, Wilson did not despair. As a keepsake of the trip, he sent what was always to her the most welcome of presents, a packet of books.

Just after this time there happened the first of two very important incidents in Elizabeth's life, upon which all sorts of

false constructions were put by magazine writers and others at her death. As regards this one, at any rate, the sober and sympathetic Boaden very convincingly, and on the authority of her own memoranda, refused to accept the many wild stories that had been told. It was a pilgrimage that Elizabeth —now in her nineteenth year—made to London itself, for the better part of a month. Tremendously exciting as it must have been for her, so far as the outside world is concerned her first stay in London resolves itself into little else but a comparatively quiet " stop " (as " The Young Visiters " would say) with her sister, Ann Hunt. Elizabeth saw not only Mrs Hunt, but apparently other married sisters, every day.

Also—a fact more pregnant with destiny—she was introduced in the course of this visit to her future husband. Mr Joseph Inchbald was a provincial actor, some seventeen years older than herself. He must have been at least a man of some cultivation. One may feel sure an intensely intelligent girl like Elizabeth would have had nothing whatever to do with him otherwise. He was, as we know, capable of reinforcing an actor's resources—scanty enough, generally speaking, in those days—by a certain amount of portrait-painting, of which he was a fair-to-middling exponent. Though very little seen in London, Inchbald had a good provincial reputation—especially in comic old men, such as Sir Anthony Absolute. According to Tate Wilkinson, he was able to employ his brush not only in portraiture, but in theatrical scenery as well—at times a more useful adjunct to the actor's art! Unfortunately, Inchbald had been on more than one occasion indiscreet in his affections. He had already a grown-up son, George, and a little boy called Robert—neither of them sanctioned offspring. For the present, at any rate, Inchbald was a devoted, constant, and, to all appearances, estimable admirer. During the whole of the first London visit, he passed a great part of every day in Elizabeth's company, took her to the British Museum and other precincts appropriate to country cousins, introduced her to carefully chosen friends, and saw to her and the other ladies' entertainment in the evening either at one of the theatres or elsewhere. Mr Inchbald left no doubt as to the honourable nature of his attentions, and was also quite candid over a past which was, as we have seen, not quite all that it should have

been. Elizabeth, however, did not at the moment hasten matters. She still had hopes of an engagement as actress with the Norwich company. We hear, as a matter of fact, of an appointment with the still idolised Griffith in London. She was chaperoned on this occasion by her sister Slender—apparently a prudent measure, although unnecessary, as he failed to turn up.

On the whole it was a very pleasant trip—by no means entirely frivolous, for Elizabeth went to several resorts of the graver order, quite apart from the Museum, these including the Foundling, in the height of its popularity as a show-place. She was also unremitting in her attendances at Mass. At last, after she had been something over three weeks in town, Mr Inchbald had an engagement in Birmingham, and gave Elizabeth and her sisters a little farewell party. They went to Vauxhall Gardens—then in their heyday—quitting the expensive supper there for a more modest feast afterwards at a tavern in the neighbourhood.

This was the last Elizabeth saw of Mr Inchbald for a good long while—not, it may readily be understood, through his fault. She returned in two days to Standingfield. He continued to write letters of graduated fervour both to her mother and to herself, and this went on right through the summer and autumn. Elizabeth was by no means in a hurry. She made this so clear to Mr Inchbald that he left off writing for some months. But he could not give her up, and early the following spring came a letter from him, urging his suit as seriously as could well be. To this, Elizabeth's reply has been preserved. In the light of certain subsequent entries in her diary one can see clearly that, though it may be the truth, it is not the whole truth. None the less it is too delicious to miss.

> " You see, Mr Inchbald " (she writes), " I have complied with your request, by answering your letter immediately. Indeed, I was not a little disturbed at first sight of it, with wondering what new correspondent I had got; for as so many things of consequence had occurred since I last saw the hand, it had really slipt my remembrance. You inquire, whether the pleasures of Bury fair are not worn off? I must confess they are not; for although, like all others, they were intermixed with pains which at the time of enjoyment robbed 'em of the power of bestowing happiness, yet the

recollection of 'em can (bestow it) : 'tis sweet, and not to be rivalled by any other, unless the delights of London ; but they for some time have daily grown the weakest, which can easily be accounted for ; for as that impression was first made, 'tis natural it will be first erased. I find you have seen my thoughts on marriage ; but, as you desire it, I will repeat them. In spite of your eloquent pen, matrimony still appears to me with less charms than terrors : the bliss arising from it, I doubt not, is superior to any other—but best not to be ventured for (in my opinion), till some little time have proved the emptiness of all other ; which it seldom fails to do. But to enter into marriage with the least reluctance, as fearing you are going to sacrifice part of your time, must be greatly imprudent : fewer unhappy matches I think would be occasioned, if fewer persons were guilty of this indiscretion,—an indiscretion that shocks me, and which I hope Heaven will ever preserve me from ; as must be your wish, if the regard that you have professed for me be really mine, which I am not wholly undeserving of ; for, as much as the strongest friendship can allow, I am, yours, E. SIMPSON."

Meanwhile there was not much chance of melancholy brooding, even in the recesses of Suffolk, for so large and so gay a family as the Simpsons. We hear of them staying in Bury for the fair, with the usual interludes of invitations to the rehearsals and performances at the theatre. It was at this time that Elizabeth went to see her brother George and the wife he had recently married perform for the first time at Norwich. There, too, Elizabeth enjoyed the much-longed-for privilege of a personal interview with the Griffith of her dreams. Whether it was on this account, or in view of theatrical ambitions disappointed in some other quarter, Elizabeth confessed herself in her diary to have been " unhappy " now, and " *very unhappy* " throughout the following winter. She was carrying on a clandestine correspondence with her brother George and her sister Ann Hunt, and possibly making plans already for what was to happen when the Standingfield hedgerows should be once again gemmed with green.

She herself was not, to all seeming, exactly sure what was the chief cause of her discontent with things in general. One can guess pretty well that it was partly the artistic ambitions she

still cherished; but it was obviously partly a battle in her bosom between the adored Griffith, who had evidently proved obdurate in the matter of an engagement in the Norwich company, and the ever-ready, but not quite so acceptable, Mr Inchbald. In her diary for January were three of the most subtly eloquent entries that could well be inscribed upon paper. They are a little comedy in themselves :—

" 22nd. Saw Mr Griffith's picture.
28th. Stole it.
29th. Rather disappointed at not receiving a letter from Mr Inchbald."

Quite apart from these matters, Elizabeth noticed in her diary that various friends had slackened in their visits. She was evidently disheartened for many reasons, and in a mood to look upon everything on the side of misfortune. But that Griffith—whether as manager, or as man, or as both—was intimately bound up with the event which was already casting its shadow before it, is beyond doubt. Her original scheme would seem to have been to run off surreptitiously and join the Norwich company, as her brother had done openly. Towards the end of February she made a flying visit to Norwich, arriving there by seven in the evening, had an interview with Mr Griffith, and, at the witching hour of midnight, started for home again, without her absence causing any commotion (if it was known) in the family circle. This was evidently followed by a bitter disappointment, for her diary betrayed that towards the end of March she received a letter from him which " almost distracted her." Accordingly, she determined upon a new and far more daring exploit. She decided to run away alone to the London of her dreams and of the one month's happy sojourn—how mad a thing in those days for a poor but pretty farmer's daughter it is difficult for us, of these quick-moving times, fully to appreciate !

On the tenth of April she secretly packed her things, and wrote a farewell letter to her mother. It was a letter which leaves the reason of her departure, rather curiously, to be understood. Whether it was entirely ambition for the stage seems still doubtful, considering Mrs Simpson's ready interest in stage affairs, and the fact that Elizabeth's brother George was

already on the boards. It would certainly appear that either Mrs Simpson had taken some special exception to Elizabeth's venture, or that there was some other impulsive—perhaps sentimental, possibly Griffithian—reason on the disappointed girl's own part.

> " By the time " (so the letter went) " you receive this I shall have left Standingfield, and perhaps for ever. You are surprised, but be not uneasy. Believe the step I have taken, however indiscreet, is no ways criminal ; unless I sin by not acquainting you with it, which was impossible for me to do, though strongly pressed by the desire of giving you a personal farewell. I now endure every pang one not lost to all feeling must on thus quitting the tenderest and best of parents. I would say ' most beloved,' too, but cannot prove my affection. Yet time may. To that I must submit my hope of regaining your regard.
>
> " The censure of the world I despise ; as the most worthy incur the reproaches of *that*. Should I ever think you wish to hear from me, I will write."

Of Elizabeth's adventures on this amazing journey very few have been preserved by herself, and many of the romances woven round it by the scandal-mongers are not worthy even of recalling. For so essentially vivacious a writer as Elizabeth usually was, her own account is singularly without detail. " On the eleventh of April," she wrote in her memorandum, " early in the morning, with much fear and difficulty, I left my mother's house, unknown to anyone, came to London in the Norwich Fly, and got lodgings at the ' Rose and Crown ' in St John's Street." From the moment of her arrival at the old Clerkenwell hostelry until the time, ten days after, when " by pure accident " she " happened " (to use her own language) " on brother Slender," her experiences of the desolation and horror that awaited defenceless beauty then—if they do not do so still—in the unknown world of London, read like a chapter from some fictional moralist. The fact, on the other hand, that they had a comparatively happy ending might detract from their value as a homily. In a curious way, her arrival and its object remind one of Shakespeare's. But there was a great difference between the already married and thoroughly sophisticated young rascal from Stratford, and the rural

Suffolk beauty, who had neither his knowledge of the world, nor the means that his sex gave of making a ready living by any honourable means, however humble. Like him, however, Elizabeth had a will to succeed which carried her safely through temptations and ordeals that only the young and beautiful know what it is to undergo.

She had, so one gathers, just a little money—but a very little, —and for a time avoided having recourse to her married sisters with a stubbornness which suggests that pride was by no means the smallest element in her nature. On the morning after her arrival, so her diary averred, she went to Charing Cross to call upon a distant connection, whose help she would not be ashamed to have enlisted, and whom she understood to live opposite what was then Northumberland House. To her infinite chagrin, she founded that her friends had quitted business, and had retired altogether into Wales. As is, perhaps, not uncharacteristic of the optimism of youth, she had never bargained for them not being there, and was at her wits' end where to go. Pride made her fear rather than wish to see any of her actual family, though she fancied she caught sight of her sister Slender and her sister Ann Hunt. In the afternoon she took a short walk, and in the evening wandered around Covent Garden disconsolate and friendless. So far from her romance-reading being responsible for any recklessness in her, it was probably this that made her supernaturally cautious, filling her with nameless terrors, and making her look upon any admiring man or motherly sort of woman as a possible ogre planning her destruction.

On the evening of the next day, she made her first definite efforts to get in touch with the people of the theatres. She called on Reddish—that " indifferent actor," according to Churchill, with " a figure clumsy and a vulgar face, devoid of spirit as of pleasant grace," who married the mother of the great George Canning. This interview seems to have been wholly ineffective, but she was inspired to greater hopes by a visit to the far worthier Thomas King, the original Sir Peter Teazle and Garrick's especial friend at Drury Lane. He was already, presumably, contemplating his famous management of Sadler's Wells, and led the trembling Elizabeth to expect a visit from him at her lodging on the following morning. He did not,

however, come, and she fancied—probably quite wrongly, but in her nervous state mere indifference was inconceivable to her—that he had come, and that, when he had seen the outside of her very humble abode, he had determined to give himself no further trouble about her. Whether on this account or not, she left the "Rose and Crown," and after many strange encounters found herself at the "White Swan," on Holborn Bridge. This happened, according to a story which at any rate she did not deny in after life, at the end of a night such as no girl would assuredly wish to live through twice!

She had, it seems, arrived one evening, after a fruitless search for an appropriate dwelling elsewhere, at a house not far from the Strand, and asked a lodging for the night, which was readily granted. The people were hospitable enough, and indeed had taken her in out of pure humanity. Such, however, was Elizabeth's nervousness and fear of all that she had read and heard—and, perhaps, seen—of the dangers of London, that no sooner had she gone to bed than sudden, though groundless, panic regarding a certain male member of the household seized upon her. Hastily dressing, and jamming her few things into her bandbox, she rushed out of the house, leaving her really kind hosts in a mood where wonder and pity ousted all thought of anger. Elizabeth fled through the streets, and, seeing a bill up calling attention to an acknowledged lodging-house, boldly entered. Here, with desperate ingenuity, she pretended to be a milliner's apprentice, whose mistress had sudden occasion for her bed on the arrival of some unexpected visitors from the country. The people to whom she told this fine story, of course, did not credit it; and upon turning round her head, whom should Elizabeth see but the very man from whom she had flown so precipitately! He had followed her, merely from kindly curiosity, to see what she really would do with herself. She now meditated another flight, in her shame at detection; but the door was locked upon her, and a constable was threatened. At this terrible juncture, a little boy of twelve proved her champion. Upon seeing her tears he began to cry himself, and told his mother that he would never go to school again if they did not let the young lady go.

Accordingly, almost dead with fright, she found herself in the street again at two o'clock in the morning. Wandering

aimlessly about, she made her way to Holborn Bridge, now succeeded by Holborn Viaduct, and saw there a coach, which she heard was full, just starting off for York! Here again her inventive faculties came to her rescue. She pretended to be a disappointed passenger, and was accorded a little room at the top of the house. None the less, she was still under strong suspicion, and the good landlady took the precaution—probably as welcome to Elizabeth as any other—of locking her in.

One gathers that Elizabeth soon convinced the "White Swan" folk as to her *bona fides*, whether they believed the coach story or no; for she was able to stay here for ten days unmolested. With practically no money, she lived upon a roll or two of bread and a drink of water from her bedroom jug. She walked out in the daytime to pretended dinners with unexistent friends, avoiding the main streets, and in the evening for the most part shut herself in her room with some precious books. These, like Prospero, she had brought with her as not the least important part of her travelling kit. She read plays with a view to her art as a would-be actress—*The Grecian Daughter*, *Othello*, Mrs Centlivre's lively comedy, *The Wonder*; and for farce, *The Devil to Pay*, in which her youthful hopes may have anticipated the full tide of popular enjoyment which was to flow afterwards with Dorothy Jordan's Nell. She worked, too, at *The Tempest*. Whether or no she saw in her glass an ideal representative of Miranda, such a vision was undoubtedly there; for at this time Elizabeth was even lovelier than when her beauty was the cynosure of the fashionable world. She was tall, slender, straight, with the purest complexion, features exquisite in their delicacy, hair of a golden auburn, and eyes full at once of spirit and sweetness. Among other books that she had brought with her was one which few modern pilgrims of her age would probably carry with them. This was Dr Young's *Universal Passion*. However little it might serve to inspire and console nowadays, it seems to have had a profound message to Elizabeth in that little garret by Holborn Bridge!

During her stay at the "White Swan," she had just one more interview with her friend King, who had evidently explained his non-arrival on the first day, and appears to have given her considerable hopes of finding at any rate something to do

upon the London stage. With this to cheer her, and, as we say nowadays, "something to write home about," Elizabeth had not the same anxiety to avoid her family as she had at first. By this time, too, the probability is that they had begun, from one source or another, to hear about her. Indeed, some time before the end of her stay she herself had written a letter to her sister, Dorothy Hunt, from whom she received a reply that was altogether encouraging. Moreover, she had already struck up quite a friendship with the people of the house, and was invited down to drink tea with them, with the inevitable result that they began to admire her as much as they had distrusted her on the night when she made so strange an entry. The fact of her identity seems also to have got about in far less desirable quarters. During her stay in Holborn, she received no less than three letters from strange gentlemen, which were sent to her in her own name and "met with the treatment they deserved."

Finally, matters came to a head by the "accidental" meeting with brother-in-law Slender, whom she came across in a way which makes one feel that it cannot have been quite so accidental as she imagined. It was on one of her visits to King. Slender seems to have been in no mood—perhaps one should say, in no condition—for diplomacy. Among Elizabeth's own papers was discovered after her death a torn fragment which old Boaden, not altogether maliciously, put together again. As it explains the whole occurrence better than anything else could do, here it is, just as it stands in Boaden's rendering :—

> "In the year seventeen hundred and seventy-two, or some time before, it was (I think) fashionable for gentlemen occasionally to curse and swear in conversation; and poor Mr Slender would fain be in the fashion, whether it threatened peril to body or soul. He suddenly interrupted our conversation, reeling from the double pressure of bad health and bad wine, and with an oath demanded 'where Miss Simpson meant to sleep that night?' I told him where I lodged; and that, as my sister sent no word to the contrary, I should remain at Holborn Bridge. He allowed the house to be a respectable one, but said that he would see me safe to it; and then with another oath he added, that by six in the morning he should come for me in a post-chaise, and take

me down to my village of Standingfield. With all his numerous faults, Mr Slender was in reality good-natured; but his good-nature consisted in frightening you to death, to have the pleasure of recovering you: in holding an axe over your head, for the purpose of pronouncing a reprieve."

This account leaves, as may be seen, nothing to be imagined save the exact conversation which Elizabeth and Mr King were having at the time. It was, in any case, the beginning of a very happy conclusion to the whole enterprise. As soon as she came home, Elizabeth bade farewell to her kind friends in Holborn, went to her sister Huggins's, where she dined, and then, with Mrs Huggins, came to her sister Ann Hunt's. She was now happier than, a day or two before, she could possibly have conceived. Not less so as, after a few days, Mr Inchbald (whom we, perhaps, have been more ready to forget than Elizabeth) called at her sister Slender's, and proved himself more than ever ready to renew his attentions. From this time Elizabeth kept up an almost daily intercourse with all her sisters in town. Also, almost exactly a month after her truancy from Standingfield, she wrote a letter to her good mother in a very different strain from that at her departure, and was duly forgiven. It was not until after her reconciliation with her mother that she consented to be taken to the play—though this, of course, was what she had longed for all the time. She afterwards visited the theatre about twice a week. She set, moreover, a very good example even to some modern neophytes by being equally desirous of instruction in her intended art as for an engagement as a member of "the profession."

Just to show what were the temptations through which Elizabeth was even now to pass, and from which she emerged free, not only from all moral reproach, but from the priggishness that goes so often with mere respectability, one must set down her unfortunate experience of another famous actor of the day, namely, James Dodd. He was, it may be recalled, an actor almost beyond rivalry in certain comically brainless parts. He was the prince of fops upon the stage—a great Sir Andrew Ague-cheek and Sir Benjamin Backbite. Charles Lamb has enshrined his memory in one of the most charming of his essays, describing him as "a man of reading" who "left at his death a choice collection of old English literature." Lamb accounted him

to have been in himself " a man of wit." It was Dodd, too, whom Lamb met, as he so delightfully tells, " on a summer day in the Temple "—" a comely, sad personage, who, from his grave air and deportment, I judged to be one of the old Benchers of the Inn." " He had," adds Lamb, " a serious, thoughtful forehead, and seemed to be in meditation upon mortality." If the Dodd whom Lamb met had been thinking in his old age of a certain stage aspirant who had visited him in eager and pure hope some twenty years before, his thoughts might have been turned not merely to mortality, but with advantage to something in the nature of repentance. Dodd, it seemed, had expressed a willingness to engage Elizabeth. In fact, she had actually settled with him, and he had made her some presents. On calling upon him, however, to ratify the agreement, she was, to use her own words, " terrified and vexed beyond measure at his behaviour "—so much so that, although she did not mention it in her diary, she was provoked to snatch up a basin of hot water and dash it in his face! After this, instead of apologising, he simply broke off the engagement without shame, and she was afterwards repulsed from his door four times.

Pleasanter memories continue to cling to the " harmonious " name of Griffith, with whom she now had some friendly interviews, with no immediate professional result. To tell the truth, as it was to fall out, there was no urgent need. The time when Elizabeth was to find refuge from all predicaments under the sheltering arm of Inchbald was close at hand. His counsel and knowledge of his own profession had already proved invaluable both as regards Griffith and Dodd. During Mrs Slender's absence from town for a few days, Inchbald was so extremely assiduous as to make the honourable reward that he desired a matter almost of justice. Elizabeth herself was by this time no longer so coldly disposed as she had been before her great adventure. So, on the very evening of Mrs Slender's return home, a Catholic priest of the name of Rice called at the house and married Elizabeth and Mr Inchbald then and there. On the following day they went to church, where they were married according to the Protestant rites, though Mr Inchbald was, like his bride, a Roman Catholic—not, one fears, a very earnest one. There was, as may be gathered, no bevy of brides-

maids or elaborate send-off party. Sister Slender and Elizabeth Inchbald, as she now was, went to the play in the evening, in defiance of all omens, to see Mr Inchbald act Oakley in *The Jealous Wife*. Alas and alas, the omen proved in the end all too true ; but there were many happy days to come before that unfortunate fulfilment—and indeed after !

CHAPTER II

ROGUES AND VAGABONDS

Her First Appearance—The Old Stock-Companies—A Strolling Player—Some Adventures in Scotland—To France and Back Again—" Blindman's Buff " with Mrs Siddons—Death of Mr Inchbald.

IT was a very busy but hopeful honeymoon that Elizabeth Inchbald and her (at the moment) worthy husband spent at Bristol, where Mr Inchbald had been engaged to act. On their way, at Marlborough, they met the still unrepentant Mr Dodd, who noticeably refrained from wishing them joy upon their marriage. They were, however, easily consoled. On their arrival at Bristol they took lodgings near College Green, and, as it happened, ran across some of the very players with whom Mrs Inchbald had become acquainted at Bury. There was no want of amusement. Quite apart from the delightful Avonside walks, Mrs Inchbald was a welcome and intensely interested guest at the morning rehearsals. At least twice or thrice a week she proved an appreciative member of Mr Inchbald's evening audience. In this way she allowed herself a week of blissful leisure, after which she began to think seriously of taking up again her task of preparing herself for her chosen profession. Among other things, she wrote out the part of Cordelia—not Shakespeare's own, but Tate's bombastic perversion with a " happy ending." Unfortunately, whatever hopes Elizabeth had of dispensing just then such charm and pathos as survive Tate's handling were to be postponed on account of the sudden illness of the prospective Lear—namely, her husband. She attended him devotedly. After about a week they were able to take a dish of tea here and there with friends.

Even already—sad to relate!—Mrs Inchbald was made, whether justly or no, to feel the pangs of jealousy. Among their new-found Bristol acquaintances was the beautiful Mrs

Hartley, destined to a famous career at Covent Garden. To this lady Mr Inchbald seemed, in his wife's eyes, a little too particularly attached. One likes to think there was " nothing in it " ; and, for all serious purposes, this was so. But it was undoubtedly a foreshadowing of more genuine trials of Elizabeth's affection that were to come. Mrs Hartley was, like Mrs Inchbald, tall and fair. That she was a fascinating woman is clear enough, for it was on her account that " Gentleman " Smith of Drury Lane, the original Charles Surface, and admired of all admirers, deserted his wife, the sister of Lord Sandwich. Mrs Hartley was in later days a favourite subject of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was especially attracted by her auburn hair—though Boaden says that even Sir Joshua did not do her entire justice. Garrick described her as " the finest creature he ever saw " ; and the poet Mason wrote a tragedy, *Elvira*, in homage to her beauty. As an actress, Mrs Hartley, who had a bad voice and nothing much in the way of intellect, proved an undoubted failure. She lived to be the last survivor but two of Garrick's company, and died at seventy-three. Anyhow, even if Mr Inchbald was tempted, his young wife might have had comfort in the fact that his infatuation was shared by others, and that his pretensions were soon afterwards to be eclipsed !

Meanwhile, Mr Inchbald improved his leisure, and possibly diminished his bill, by painting a portrait of the daughter of the house where they boarded, and " brother Slender," now forgiven, came to stay with them. So the summer passed, until the great day—at the beginning of September—when Mrs Inchbald felt herself sufficiently in training, both as regards speech and otherwise, to make her actual debut upon the Bristol stage. She did so in the part of Cordelia—her husband supporting her, or being supported by her, as Lear. It does not appear to have been a very great or even a very exciting performance, and its renown did not reach beyond the confines of Bristol city. But it was sufficiently successful to inspire her to further practice. With all his faults, Mr Inchbald was a zealous professor of his own art. To him, both at home and in their walks abroad, Elizabeth " spouted " (to use her own word) the parts that she had learnt whilst he was otherwise employed, till at length she began to feel herself ready for more assaults upon fame.

For the time being, however, she contented herself with these domestic efforts. It was not until October of that year that she made her next appearance before the public—and that was far away at Glasgow. Before then she had had time not only to spend a fortnight with Mr Inchbald among their London friends, but also to take him down to Bury, and to the old home at Standingfield. There the " prodigal daughter " found the old lady, her mother, and sister Deborah, or " Debby," as she was affectionately known, waiting to welcome her with open arms. The whole party, just by way of recalling old days, paid a visit to the Bury theatre that evening, and after the play had supper together at " The Ship," returning to London by the next coach. In London also, Mrs Inchbald was very delighted to re-establish intercourse with her married sisters, who had stood by her in her hour of adversity, and to whom she was to act as a persistent and never-failing fairy-godmother throughout long years to come.

The new opening which both she and her husband were so eagerly seeking was, as it proved, to take them far away, to a land which is, in general, more famous for the people that come from it, than for those that go to it—in a word, as has been already hinted, to bonnie Scotland. The engagement had come through an old Bury admirer of Mrs Inchbald's, of whom we have already heard, the ever-loyal Mr Wilson. He had got them an introduction to that fine old actor, West Digges. It was he whom Mrs Inchbald's future manager, Colman, of the Haymarket, called a " bit of old stage-buckram," and whose costume as Cato, with its black stockings, black gloves, powdered periwig, and gilded " shape," Foote derided as suggesting a " Roman chimney-sweep on May Day."

They went by sea, and had a very stormy passage in what was then a far more adventurous method of journeying than it is now, and landed at Leith after seven days' voyage. There they rested for a day, and went on by coach to Glasgow, where the excellent Digges was performing. Digges proved a good friend in a strange land, and immediately settled that Mrs Inchbald should have another try at Cordelia, to her husband's Lear. This again does not seem to have been a remarkable performance. None the less, from now she was seriously and practically launched upon her career as an actress. Her next

part was the bewitching Anne Boleyn in *Henry VIII.* Though Anne Boleyn was, as we all know, a brunette, one can quite understand Mrs Inchbald being at no loss for those little touches of temperament that make the scene with the Old Lady so fascinating! Digges played Wolsey, one of his favourite characters, Inchbald having to content himself with Cranmer. After this, for some reason or other, Mrs Inchbald seems to have been discouraged, possibly with reason, for she was undoubtedly put now and again to some very humble parts. She was one of the witches in *Macbeth*, and was particularly annoyed at having to "walk" (as she called it) in the pantomime, which was then by no means confined to Christmas.

All this was, at the same time, the very finest practice possible. It is well to remember that in those days the stock-companies, although they had their faults, were schools not merely for the repetition of the mannerisms of popular players, but for the actual, first-hand study of Shakespeare and of the "legitimate" drama. To a self-educated girl like Mrs Inchbald, the experience must have been all the more valuable, however small the part that was to be played. Probably it would be wrong to pretend for a moment that the average acting, in any given play, was better than the highest standard of a specially chosen and rehearsed company, even in the provinces, of to-day. There was, we know, an enormous deal of hurried and slipshod work. Salaries were small and manners were rough. But each of the better-class provincial companies had, at any rate, two or three actors schooled in a very fine tradition; and each summer, when the patent-theatres were shut, came the "stars" from London, not to oust but to reinforce the local talent. The fact also that the patent-theatres more or less rigorously enforced their monopoly in London kept many an actor in the provinces who would, in these days, very soon have found his way to town.

There was, too, far more chance for young people to distinguish themselves, with the constant change of bill. That an unknown young tyro, as Mrs Inchbald then was, should have been allowed to play Cordelia is a case in point. So there was nothing, after all, that need have very much distressed Mr Inchbald's ambitious young bride in the drudgery which she undoubtedly went through at Glasgow and later on at Edinburgh.

Possibly her disappointment was a little aggravated by some unfortunate quarrels with her husband. If he had not succeeded immediately in getting always the most satisfactory part for her, he had failed equally, one gathers, for himself! Probably, however, the true reason at the heart of it all was that Elizabeth had not yet altogether vanquished her stammer, and in other ways was very far from being, as yet, a completely accomplished actress. Among other things, it should be noted, this early training of hers helped to give her a knowledge of the acted English drama as a whole that did much to fit her out in later years as its first editress and critic.

From Glasgow the company moved to Edinburgh, where Elizabeth began by walking on in the masquerade-scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, afterwards playing Anne Boleyn and Cordelia again. She had, none the less, to put up with some very undistinguished parts, for we hear of her as one of Macheath's " doxies " in the *Beggar's Opera*, and as one of the Bacchantes in *Comus*. Needless to say, her " good beauties " were to some extent responsible for a disposition on old Digges's part to make managerial capital of her charms, even when there was no room for her in a leading character. Among other parts she took at this time was Calphurnia, to her husband's Cæsar, Lady Anne in *Richard III.*, and Lady Percy in *Henry IV.* (Part I.). Also, when her husband played Othello on his benefit night, there was a useful touch of realism in the fact that his Desdemona was his wife in reality.

This performance had, it may be added, a certain importance from another point of view than that of art ; for the Iago was played by a Mr Sterling, who aggravated Othello's wrong by paying what was evidently an undue attention to Desdemona's impersonatress in her private capacity ! As was to happen so often, Mrs Inchbald was herself not immune from temptation —fanned, one fears, by a certain amount of neglect on Mr Inchbald's own side. Inchbald, in his turn, charged his young wife with apathy. It is a significant fact that just at this time she noted in her diary, quite ingenuously, a discontinuance of her visits to chapel. Also she took a dislike at this time—a dislike which continued, and with every reason, to the end of her life—to Mr Inchbald's natural son Robert, known then as " the boy Bob," who played Fleance in *Macbeth*, and otherwise

made himself useful to the company. Affairs reached their culmination when Mr Inchbald on one occasion stayed away at a party of pleasure for a day and a night. Happily Mrs Inchbald's religion proved, as it was often to do later, her salvation. She made full confession to her spiritual father, and, for a time at any rate, checked Sterling's assiduity.

So all was made up for a jolly little tour from Glasgow, whither they had returned, to Greenock. Here, since it was not the full company, Mrs Inchbald appeared herself in all the chief parts. The result seems to have been satisfactory to all concerned. On the Inchbalds rejoining Digges at Edinburgh, the great manager paid them special attention, honoured Mrs Inchbald with an airing in his chaise to and from the theatre, and spent Sunday with them. In such high favour was Mrs Inchbald already, that Digges gave her permission to send for her brother George—poor actor though he was known to be—with promise of a part.

Their next adventure was on the way to Aberdeen, whither the company was bound, for each stock-company had in those times to cover a huge district in its circuit. Before the arrival of railways, the " strolling player " was a euphemism rather than an exaggeration ! The troubles of their voyage from London to Leith were nothing to the distresses that awaited them on their way farther north. Again they started to go by sea ; but so unfriendly was the wind, that on the second day they were not above fourteen miles on their way, and, in the evening, the captain put his terribly sea-sick passengers ashore, not wishing to keep them in torture any longer without hope of progress. Having to get to Aberdeen somehow, the Inchbalds, Mr and Mrs Wilson, and " the boy Bob," decided to make the journey on foot. This, with the help of lifts in coal-carts and farm-waggons, they managed to do. It was far from being the only time that Mrs Inchbald had to take advantage (if one may so call it) of her charter as a " rogue and vagabond," and trudge it on foot from town to town.

At Aberdeen there was no question about Mrs Inchbald being the leading lady of the company. Her industry at this time—as, indeed, always—was amazing. In spite of her being laid up with a fever during her stay, she acted no fewer than thirty characters between August and the end of October,

including her old friend Cordelia, Juliet, Imogen, Desdemona, and Rosalind. It was at Aberdeen, too, that we find the first instance of what was a very important and delightful faculty of Mrs Inchbald's, namely, her power to make friends with ladies of the social world—a power with which her beauty, though it caused considerable jealousy among other actresses, never seemed to interfere. From Aberdeen they went back to Edinburgh, this time by coach as far as Montrose, but afterwards by the old method of stray carts and " Shanks's pony "—and this in miserably wet weather, with no better welcome for the night in between than that of a small public-house ! All this while, and in further seasons both at Edinburgh and Glasgow, Mrs Inchbald was quickly winning favour with her public and her friends, and enhancing her accomplishment as an actress. At Dumfries, on one occasion, a special request was sent from the ladies of the town that Mrs Inchbald should perform their favourite character of Jane Shore. In connection with another play, a delightful letter has been preserved from Digges, asking her, with all sorts of apologies, to " suffer her face to be a little marked " with a view to playing a " matron-like " part—a not unnecessary suggestion for a girl of two-and-twenty ! She was occasionally complimented with a seat in Mr Digges's own box, a much-envied distinction.

At every point—although Sterling became a little less intimate, and Elizabeth herself more attentive to her religious duties—new admirers seemed to appear. Dr Brodie, who attended her during an illness at Edinburgh, showed at least something more than professional solicitude. The repeated calls of a Mr Webb at Glasgow may have had something to do with one of the increasingly common tiffs between Elizabeth and her spouse. But what is more important than anything is the fact that she was already beginning to think of something else than the actress's art with which to win the fame that was her heart's desire. From the earliest days of her marriage she had done what she could to repair the omissions of her haphazard education, which was, in reality, hardly an education at all. She began to learn French, and to practise pronunciation. We hear of her receiving twenty lessons for the modest sum of one guinea ! Mr Inchbald, meanwhile, cultivated other interests as well as acting. He painted her portrait, and helped

to decorate the processions of the stage with flags that waved to his honour. All these things together helped to make the Inchbalds discontented with the eternal alternation of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen. Finally, a dispute that Mr Inchbald had with the Edinburgh audience brought things to a head—a dispute which ended in a riot on Mr Inchbald's account during a performance of *Jane Shore*. What the reason of it was is not recorded; but it was decisive, and they closed their engagement with Digges and quitted Edinburgh for good.

Whether or no they had long decided on the plan that was actually pursued, they undoubtedly seized the opportunity now to make a bold, not to say reckless, venture. They took a trip to France, not merely as travellers, but in the hope of staying and, if possible, making their living there. As we have seen, there were many reasons for unrest on both sides, and Elizabeth's good mother, Mrs Simpson, had been showing a growing dissatisfaction with her brilliant daughter's circumstances. Accordingly, at two o'clock on a July morning, after writing a note to her mother informing her of what the old lady probably did not consider a misfortune, Elizabeth and her husband left Edinburgh for Shields, whence they sailed for St Valérie, reaching it after a fortnight's voyage. For the moment they made no attempt at finding a serious avocation, and were content with one of those "sentimental journeys" which Sterne had just made popular, through Abbéville and by the Somme to Amiens. Even on such a journey, Mrs Inchbald's beauty and brightness of manner—for she can hardly have managed at this time to convey the charm of her wit in French—brought them instant friends among their fellow-Catholics in France. That an Abbé should have proved "very entertaining and attentive" to Elizabeth herself when they arrived at Paris was hardly surprising. A certain Friar Jerningham, of whom we are to hear later, became a valued friend; and we learn also of quite a number of the members of the English colony who called at the Inchbalds' modest hotel. Whether "in accordance with plan," or inspired by this pleasant reception, Mr Inchbald soon acted upon an idea of trying to earn their keep by giving lessons in painting. By way of proving his skill to prospective pupils, he again began a miniature of his lovely wife. Meanwhile, Elizabeth herself seems to have had

already some hope of making her literary ambitions—for they were as yet little more—a means of livelihood.

However, neither of them allowed themselves to miss the splendid opportunity that their stay in Paris offered of making all possible acquaintance with the French drama, then in the doldrums of rigorously classic formalism. Of everything that she read and saw, Mrs Inchbald took note. It had always been her habit to keep a most careful diary, with copious abstracts of the books that she read. As her after-career showed, she must have been not only an acute, but intensely patient and conscientious observer. After her death, Boaden found, in her own handwriting, whole volumes of these studies, in which she had set down descriptions of all the places that she came to, and the marrow of all sorts of histories and biographies. She was particularly exact in these, because they were partly intended for the edification of her sisters, whose intellectual as well as material welfare was her continual care, youngest but one though she was !

Now, again, Elizabeth's mother seems to have put a momentary stop to the course of adventure. It was, at any rate, a letter from her that brought the Inchbalds back from Paris, and from whatever prospects of business and pleasure it held out. Whether the cause was anxiety regarding Elizabeth herself that prompted the maternal message we do not know. There is, to be sure, a strong probability that the real reason may be one which has been known before now to have brought even a " sentimental journey " to an abrupt end, namely, lack of funds. Boaden shrewdly suggests that pecuniary help from the farm at Standingfield was not forthcoming. The journey back was a good deal less leisured than that from Scotland to France, and the travellers pressed homeward by Dieppe as quickly as ever they could to Brighton. Thus, in eleven weeks was cut short the sojourn in France which was to have lasted at least a year—according to their hopes !

While at Brighton, the Inchbalds reached the very limit of their resources. Elizabeth records in her own memoranda that several times they went without dinner or tea. Once they went into the fields to eat turnips instead of dining, so low were their resources. Fortunately for them, the theatre was a resort which needed no golden key ; but the time seems to have been

MRS. SIDDONS *Photo by Emery Walker Ld.*

From the painting by Gilbert Strutt

one of great despondency with both of them, with all their hopes of " the grand tour " shattered, and no immediate prospect even of a return to theatrical activity after the Edinburgh recession, the circumstances of which had naturally buzzed about the theatrical world. Mrs Inchbald seems to have fancied that the harmonious Griffith—her early passion—might come to her aid; but he gave, as ever, an uncertain response. One ultimately fruitful thing did happen here and now, namely, her actual beginning upon a farce, which may or may not have been the very one destined later on to be the stepping-stone to fortune.

In the end there was nothing for it but to see what a trip to London and a look round among their own friends would do. This was accordingly settled upon. They came, saw, and, as luck would have it, they found Elizabeth's old friend, Wilson, who was at Covent Garden, but dreadfully imprudent and continually in difficulties. They had a pleasant time at the theatre with him, and also met Digges, who cherished no grudge against them for their Scottish departure. Still, nothing in the way of a regular engagement made itself apparent. So the two disconsolate adventurers set their faces again to the road, and, going northward towards their old haunts, at last found a resting-place at Liverpool, where their stay was fated to afford a greater inspiration to Elizabeth's future life than anything that had yet happened to her. For it was here that she first made the acquaintance of Mrs Siddons, and began a friendship which lasted with undiminished respect and kindness on both sides, through all the changes of their fortunes, for five-and-forty years.

The manager at Liverpool was a Mr Younger, who very happily had a high opinion not only of Inchbald's own abilities as an actor, but also of Elizabeth herself, who, after about a week, played Juliet to her husband's Capulet. Although she was very much dissatisfied with herself, the audience was at any rate sufficiently indulgent. Their old manager, Digges, arrived after a while to play his favourite Wolsey to Mrs Inchbald's Anne Boleyn, and to the (it may easily be presumed) already wonderful Katherine of Sarah Siddons. Although she was even now making great strides in her art, and had much—though not, perhaps, all—of the majestic beauty that was to

distinguish her later, Mrs Siddons seems to have been at that time for the most part unconscious of the greatness that was in store for her. It is quite probable, of course, that dreams broke in now and again, and that she had always a supreme artist's ambition to deserve greatness, whether it was to be enjoyed or not. But she was still no more than a provincial player, in a respected family of provincial players. From Mrs Inchbald's own papers we learn that in her domestic concerns Mrs Siddons, then a young mother, was everything that was simple and natural—glorying in her profession, making light of its difficulties, studying her parts while she nursed her baby, and lightening her household tasks by singing away the time like any country housewife.

With Mrs Siddons's encouragement, Mrs Inchbald went vigorously on with her literary studies. It was now also that Elizabeth's whole nature was undoubtedly stimulated from every point of view by her meeting, when she and her husband were supping at Mrs Siddons's, with Sarah's brother, the great John Philip Kemble. He was then only in his twentieth year, a dark-eyed youth with a remarkably handsome and expressive countenance, displaying the "noble Roman" cast of feature which he was to preserve to the end of his days, and with a muscular and slender figure. He had already much more than the measure of learning usual among young men—having been trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood at Douay—and was extremely serious as well as ambitious. One fancies that his manner had even then a certain amount of pomp about it—indeed, everything that he writes or says undoubtedly suggests a strong admixture of the prig. None the less, he was intelligent, ambitious, manly, noble, and an altogether ideal young tragic actor.

There appears not the faintest doubt that, married though she was, our susceptible Elizabeth fell very soon over head and ears in love with John Philip. In his own way, Kemble had simple tastes. He was a devoted brother, as he was to prove a respected husband. Though essentially a "high-brow," he was fond of a friendly fireside, and, with a sympathetic company. would read aloud with much appreciation. Instantly he and Mrs Inchbald set up a friendship which, if not above romance, never went beyond the bounds of sentiment on either side.

It was at his suggestion—this credit must at least be given him—that, laying her farce aside, she began to write the famous novel, which was to make the literary world ring with her fame, and of which Kemble himself obviously figures as the hero—*A Simple Story*. Kemble also encouraged her reading of French, and she was soon able to enjoy *Gil Blas* in its original.

Not unconnected with her friendship with Kemble may be the fact that Elizabeth was now growing again very unsettled. She wished to leave Manchester, where the company had moved, and to go back to Standingfield. She had almost daily quarrels with Mr Inchbald, and visits as constantly from Kemble. In point of fact, such became her condition that there were some fears she was in danger of what was politely known in that age as "a decline." So a holiday was decided on. Taking country lodgings on Russell Moor, the Inchbalds and Mr and Mrs Siddons, together with Kemble, who was released for the time being from the York company to which he was then attached, had what was probably the most delightful time that any of them had spent, or were to spend, in their whole lives. Mr Inchbald, who seemed to recognise by now that there was no harm in his wife's friendship with John Philip, got on with his painting, while Mrs Inchbald read with Kemble. In the afternoon they would all walk out, and in the evening play cards, or sometimes indulge in a real romp, and go out upon the moor to play "Blind-man's Buff" or "Puss-in-the-Corner." Many a time, in after-years that were to bring to three of them at any rate the homage both of the great vulgar and of the small, must their thoughts have gone back to those happy, halcyon days—the "days when we went gipsying, a long while ago!"

Just at this time Mrs Inchbald was exercised upon a matter which cannot be neglected, although it was not intimately concerned with her theatrical career at the moment. She was troubled with religious doubts. In a letter to her old Paris friend, Friar Jerningham, we find her stating a point of conscience as existing in her husband's mind, but probably referring to her own. Her question was this :—

"Can a person be admitted to the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, who confesses he has strong doubts

of revealed religion; yet who, acknowledging his own incapacity to decide upon a question of such magnitude as the truth of the Scriptures, humbly submits his reason to the creed of the Church, and promises to strive against any future disbelief as against any other temptation to sin?"

The answer was moderate, cautious, and yet consolatory:

"In the outset," wrote Friar Jerningham, "it appears nearly impossible to admit to the Sacrament of the Eucharist one who professes to have doubts, and even strong doubts, not only as to that Sacrament, but even to revealed religion itself, and the truth of the Scriptures. It should seem that such doubts can but little accord with those profound sentiments of adoration, of love, and gratitude, which the Real Presence both inspires and exacts. It would be therefore safest to wait until these doubts were dispelled, before he approached that tremendous mystery. In the meanwhile, these doubts may not be sins, but simply temptations arising in timid minds, tormented by doubts constantly recurring, though constantly repelled, and which, to be absolutely conquered, might need the efficacy of the august Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. This, however, can only be determined by a sage and enlightened confessor, well knowing the person labouring under and tormented by these doubts; one well acquainted with the life he leads, the books he peruses, the society he frequents, the resistance he opposes to these doubts, and the perseverance with which he combats this kind of temptation."

That this was the answer that Mrs Inchbald was seeking, not for another, but for herself, is pretty clear from some of her reflections upon her state of mind set down in her diary. At one juncture she finds herself prone to

"no other actual sin, but great coldness and imperfection in all my duties, especially in my religious ones, as in prayer and fasting."

Then followed the supplication:—

"Almighty God! Look down upon thy erring creature! Pity my darkness and my imperfections, and direct me to the truth! Make me humble under the perplexities which accompany its practice!"

Meanwhile, the happy days flew by. Kemble sat for his portrait to Mr Inchbald, who laboured hard to become a Cosway. Mrs Siddons, returning to the country after an unsuccessful visit to London, almost threw away her ambition, and, buckling to her hard lot, passed many a day washing and ironing for her family, regaling the society in the evening with a song, or sometimes luring her august brother to join her in a duet. After a little while, Mr and Mrs Siddons left to visit York, where something like a foreshadowing of her coming glories was to reward the future Muse of Tragedy. Kemble was able to stay longer, and began a course of reading in English history. Mrs Inchbald included in her notes not only her own progress, but his as well. At the same time, he was still by no means above the relaxation of a game of cards. He also rather fancied himself as a conjuror, and he and his fair friend would invent innocent games not only with " the Devil's picture-books," but with wax, earth, thread, wire—anything that chance provided.

At last, even the survivors of the little holiday party were separated ; but it was only for a while. The whole circle was reunited later at York, and for quite serious purposes, under the ægis of a grand old provincial manager, who is credited with having introduced more great actors and actresses to the stage than any other of his time. This was Tate Wilkinson. He was a remarkable man. With all his faults of vanity and undoubted occasional spite, and with all his eccentricities, it would be difficult to find a better example of the value of the eighteenth-century stock-companies as a training ground in comparison with the present state of affairs, than is provided by Tate Wilkinson's management of the Yorkshire theatres. Had Wilkinson lived to-day, he would certainly not have been content with anything less than a West-End management. In his younger days he had been—next to Foote—the most extraordinary mimic of his time. Moreover, he had one advantage over the little rascal of the Haymarket—he was able to " take off " Foote himself ! It was this, by the way, that introduced him to Garrick, whose briskly patronising manner, with his " Nay, now ! " and " Hey, now ! " and " What, what ! " and " Well, well ! " Wilkinson used also mercilessly to caricature.

An old Harrow boy, son of an unfortunate chaplain to the

Savoy, Tate Wilkinson was a scholar, a gentleman by breeding, with a keen relish for a bottle of port. After having made his name as a mimic, he jogged his way cheerily through a lively but intensely laborious managerial career in the provincial theatres of Portsmouth, Bath, Dublin and, finally, in the "Yorkshire circuit," with an occasional appearance in town. Above all, in the course of his long sojourn at York, he was to become a sort of fairy godfather to a host of the young hopefuls of the stage. He gave Mrs Jordan her first part, when she was nothing more than a buxom country girl, glad of a mere pittance. He helped to bring Henderson to town, and what the Kembles and Mrs Siddons and Mrs Inchbald herself owed to him, could not easily be estimated.

In all his relations to his companies, he was generous and considerate. According to Charles Mathews, he was "a Chesterfield in all he said and did." Often in their travels between the Yorkshire towns, Tate himself would ride ahead of the company in his carriage to prepare them a specially excellent dinner at the next stopping-place. Unfortunately, a young manhood not always as temperate as that which old Adam recommended to Orlando, had its revenge in a prematurely decrepit and eccentric old age. Burlesque, which was art to the young man, got rather into the manners of the old one. His mind, towards the end of his life, had a habit of wandering between sentence and sentence, so that, to quote Mathews again, "he seemed to have got his words separately out of a dictionary, thrown them loose into a sack, and shaken them forth again promiscuously." None the less, Tate Wilkinson was a great character, a fruity, but distinguished, old fellow.

Such was the presiding genius of the York theatre, where, after some intermittent adventures at Canterbury and elsewhere, the Inchbalds now found themselves, to their great happiness and relief. In the meantime they made more friends, among them Holcroft, the astonishing author of *The Road to Ruin*, of whom we shall hear a good deal later, and who was destined to become one of Mrs Inchbald's ardent admirers. In their early York days, Mr Inchbald was not spared some twinges of Othello's weakness in view of a tenderness for Elizabeth—which the reader may have already suspected—on

the part of their old friend Digges, who turned up there for a day or two, and also of a humble member of the company called Davis, who recommended himself to her by dressing her hair zealously on the nights she performed, and seems to have " lived upon her smiles." He, like Holcroft, was destined to reappear. In neither of these cases—nor, indeed, in any others—does Mrs Inchbald seem to have given " the worthy man " any real cause for anxiety. But of her love of admiration there is no possible doubt, as her own confessions show. It is quite probable, too, that to some extent she enjoyed teasing her not impeccable but sometimes sorely-tried helpmeet. On the other hand, the true beauty of her nature was already showing itself. She was even then practising systematic self-denial with a view to helping her mother and her sister Dolly, who were just now in financial trouble at the old farm at Standingfield. It was to this end that she arranged with her husband a division of salaries, to which he strongly objected, and which may have been partly a cause of their increasingly frequent disagreements.

Just as a little sidelight upon theatrical manners of the time, a letter that Kemble wrote to Elizabeth from Liverpool, to which he and Mrs Siddons had returned on a professional visit soon after her arrival at York, is worth quoting. He tells of a riot that had recently happened for the curiously arrogant reason that the Kemble family were not supposed to be good enough for the Liverpool public, not having yet appeared before the King. At the opening of the season Mr Younger, the manager, had, Kemble says, already been threatened with a riot on this account. Accordingly, before the play began, he advanced before the curtain to make such explanation as might be deemed advisable. But it was of no use. " In vain did he attempt to oraculise " (writes Kemble), " the remorseless villains threw up their hats, hissed, kicked, stamped, bawled, did everything to prevent his being heard." Mere sound was followed by " volleys of potatoes and broken bottles." Neither Mr Siddons nor his beautiful wife appeased the tumult, " but " (says Kemble) " the wretches laughed, and would willingly have sent a peal of shouts after her in the next world, loud enough to burst the gates of her destination." " They next extinguished all the lights round the house," he continues, " then jumped upon the stage, brushed every lamp out with their

hats, took back their money, left the theatre, and determined themselves to repeat this till they have another company."

" Well, Madame," Kemble adds, " I was going to ask you what you think of all this—but I can see you laughing !—I had almost forgot to tell you every wall in the city is covered with verse and prose expressive of the contempt they hold us in."

At the tag end of this lively description of what seems to have been a pretty frequent occurrence at the time, and not only in the provinces, Kemble put some literary notes which are at once self-revealing and show that Mrs Inchbald's future success in the art that he also attempted was, at any rate to some extent, helped by his encouragement.

> " My tragedy," he writes, " has long been finished—long in Mr Harris's hands, who sent it back to me a month ago, unopened, with an assurance that it would not do. I have written a farce called *The Female Officer*, since I saw you, which was played at Manchester with great applause. Now to your writings. Pray how far are you advanced in your novel ?—what new characters have you in it—what situations ? how many distressed damsels and valourous knights ? how many prudes, how many coquettes ? what libertines, what sentimental rogues in black, and empty cut-throats in red ? I must know all this whenever you write to this quarter again, which I hope will be soon. Write a little in French, but at all events write often. You would, if you knew the pleasure I receive from the good style, lively ideas, and polished manner of your letters."

The tragedy of which he spoke was, it should be said, *Belisarius*, which was ultimately brought out at Hull. Mrs Inchbald herself acted in it, and spoke the epilogue. But it was not a resounding success, though the author is said to have emulated his hero in the fortitude with which he bore his disappointment. As to the novel which her friend was thus urging her to write, Mrs Inchbald had by no means forgotten it. She had already finished the first hundred pages, and had given it the title it was to bear, *A Simple Story*. She also read voraciously. She herself notes, as bearing upon her work, Melmoth's *Liberal Opinions* (a comparatively mild preparation for the opinions of some of the friends she was to make in after-life !), the *Letters* of Swift, *Julia Mandeville*, *Louisa Mildmay*,

Caledonian Bards, and, above all, of course, Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, then in its twelfth year.

An event, however, was now to occur which, for the time being, was as overwhelming as it was unexpected. This was the sudden death of Mr Inchbald. They had just made a little excursion to Halifax together, and had come home to Leeds, where they were playing at the time, when Mr Inchbald, on going to bed after dinner, expired, almost in a moment and without any warning, in his wife's arms. A considerable amount of mystery has been very needlessly manufactured in connection with Mr Inchbald's death from an obvious heart-attack. Those who wish for a kind of mock-heroic description (in what one must confess to be the worst possible taste, but typical of the age) can find it in Tate Wilkinson's own memoirs. Much has been made of the fact that Mrs Inchbald herself called the day itself " a day of horror," and the week following " a week of grief, horror, and almost distraction." After all, to have had her husband die in her arms without the rites of his and her Church, with all the imperfections that she knew so well on his head, and all the little quarrels that her vanity may quite well have caused never properly made up—this would surely have been explanation enough for any confession of grief on her part, even if it seemed inappropriate to those frequent tiffs we have heard about ! Mr Inchbald had certainly never been the object of her romantic love. He had not always been faithful, or always wise or considerate. But he had been her adviser, protector, father, brother, counsellor and friend. There had been many around her worse than he. Without him, she would assuredly never have made her way on the stage as she did, and at the time of her escapade in London he had been a very tower of defence. Inchbald was buried at Leeds, and Kemble, who was then to so great an extent Mrs Inchbald's guide and soul-comrade, wrote the Latin inscription. This, it must be admitted, was hardly borne out at every point by its frequently errant, if well-meaning, subject. The translation runs :—

" Stay, Traveller ! Here are buried the remains of Joseph Inchbald, comedian : unrivalled among his contemporaries in the fictions of the stage, and a bright example

of virtue in the realities of life. Hence, malignant superstition, and evil-counselling fanaticism! For, in your despite, this stone shall testify to all that, in this prison of earth, a man, ever steadfast in the right, dear to his associates, and (for his means) bountiful to the poor, an excellent father, a faithful husband, and in all things most observant of the claims of society, who lent a charm to leisure and an ornament to study, reposes, in confiding hope to enjoy eternal happiness through the mercy of his immortal God! He died in his 44th year, on the 6th of June, 1779."

Possibly more appropriate than all this high-falutin would have been the alternative inscription in simple English, also by Kemble, which Mrs Inchbald preserved among her papers :— " The remains of Joseph Inchbald, comedian, lie interred here ; a most worthy man, who, leaving behind him an affectionate wife, died in his 44th year, June 6th, 1779." However, effusions such as Kemble's more extended effort were the fashion of the day, and, not content with that, Kemble had indited an ode, in imitation of Collins's *Ode to Evening*, but a very affected and insincere affair. The poem was afterwards published at York with some other fugitive pieces. The rumour that Kemble himself destroyed the whole edition, though it may not be true, is, at any rate, hardly to be regretted. Anyhow, throughout the rest of his long life, he was always ready to buy up a copy, even at a fancy price.

A little while after Inchbald's death, a play was performed at Leeds for Mrs Inchbald's benefit. Her elder stepson, George Inchbald, was a comfort to her, and became in his father's place a member of Wilkinson's company. Kemble lodged in the same house with Mrs Inchbald and George. He still, as usual, passed with her all the time he could spare, and a letter from her old medical attendant in Edinburgh, Dr Brodie, who seems always to have been prepared to be something more to her than a medical attendant, was peculiarly welcome. With him she had a good deal of correspondence with regard to her novel, which she soon finished, and upon which George Inchbald and Kemble also gave their characteristic criticisms— George sympathetic but uninspired ; Kemble nothing if not academic. But of this we are to hear nothing of any real importance for another twenty years. Wilkinson offered her,

if she would stay in the company, the princely salary of a guinea and a-half per week! This amount makes all the more extraordinary Boaden's contention that her means were "exceedingly good." She had, he says, already amassed "£222 in Long Annuities," together with other small investments, and "£128 in cash." If the "£222" represented a yearly dividend, the statement is quite unbelievable. The mere fact of there being anything at all is sufficiently astonishing when one remembers that, a year or two before, she and her husband were dining in the fields on turnips out of sheer penury. Whatever the explanation is, from now onward Mrs Inchbald never ceased from her curious combination of shrewd business dealings coupled with extreme parsimony and ungrudged generosity. The more she had, the more frugal she became, and the more she gave away.

Anyhow, we are soon to bid York farewell, and to find far greater and more lasting glories awaiting our heroine than the provincial applause of a frankly indifferent leading-actress. But the memory of the old York days never left her. And however often she may have been tempted to change her name from that of the sometimes-devoted husband who lay buried at Leeds, she remains Mrs Inchbald still!

CHAPTER III

PALMY DAYS AT COVENT GARDEN

To London at last—Dick Suett as Suitor—Catholicism and the Stage—From Hamlet to Bellario—Theatres after Garrick—The Covent Garden Company—Thomas Holcroft.

IT was not immediately—or indeed without considerable difficulty—that our Elizabeth found her way from the Yorkshire frontiers to what was to prove for her the golden gate of London acceptance. For a time she remained with the York company, acting her usual characters. But the shock of her husband's death naturally made her ready for almost anything that might bring a change of environment or a gleam of hope. " Began this year a happy wife—finished it a wretched widow ! " So ran the entry in her pocket-book. Little did she think that, so far from being a disaster, the very fact that she was now thrown completely upon her own resources was guiding her insensibly to the fulfilment of more than all her ambitions, though not, perhaps, of all her dreamt-of happiness !

She laboured assiduously, not only at her work as an actress, but also—having now finished her novel—at her other " string " as a would-be playwright, and she never ceased to read and analyse every book that came in her way. Meanwhile, before she had been six months a widow, the possibility of her remarriage had already been pressed upon her from many quarters—not, assuredly, through her own fault, for we have every reason to know what her own wishes were. All through her life, indeed, she was never allowed to rest from the pursuit of admirers, not all of them matrimonially inclined, with whom she was, for her own peace of mind, all too prone to sympathise. But, in spite of many temptations, nothing would induce her to forfeit her honour. It was alike characteristic and peculiarly to her credit that, in almost every instance, these admirers

became, after their necessary repulse, quiet and agreeable friends. Perhaps it was, as Boaden delightfully remarks, that they had an " advocate in her vanity."

From distant Edinburgh Dr Brodie was still adoring ; and, as a touch of comedy amidst the sorrows of this mourning Olivia, there can hardly but have been some refreshment in the fact that Richard Suett, the " Dicky Gossip " of familiar fame, soon to become the complete and irresistible Sir Toby Belch of Drury Lane, was now numbered among those who came to " the widow's wooing." " The very personification of weak whimsicality," as Leigh Hunt calls him, " with a laugh like a peal of giggles," tippling and titubant, with his " loose and shambling gait and slippery tongue," Dicky was to prove the most popular, if not the greatest Shakespearean low-comedian there ever was—at any rate since the days of Shakespeare's own Will Kempe. His famous chuckle " O la la " has become immortalised by every essayist and critic of the time. Dicky was, as it happened, one of Tate Wilkinson's discoveries, and had already been nine years in the company ; but we hear very little of him so far as Mrs Inchbald is concerned until this critical moment. Probably he was too consistent a frequenter of the company at any public-house within his range to be quite at his ease in the " high-brow " set where the late Mr Inchbald had been able to make himself acceptable. Suett had been originally a Westminster Abbey choir-boy. To the end of his career he was a songster and a " dog at a catch." He came to Tate Wilkinson with little better recommendation than " a most unpromising pair of legs." It says a great deal for Wilkinson's judgment that Suett was now in receipt of the largest salary in the company. It says even more for Wilkinson's generosity that when, very shortly, a handsome offer came from Drury Lane, Wilkinson in the friendliest spirit tore up an agreement by which Dicky was bound to him for two years with a penalty of a hundred pounds for forfeiture.

It may be that Dicky was emboldened to aspire to the hand of his old colleague's young and lovely widow through having just taken an interesting and important part in a benefit that was organised on behalf of her stepson, George Inchbald. Mrs Inchbald, whose slim figure was particularly suitable for male characters, enacted the Prince herself—neither the first nor the

last woman-Hamlet!—with George as her Horatio. Suett doubled the parts of Rosencrantz and Gravedigger, and so gave the gallery the delight of seeing their old friend wearing those dozen waistcoats, the taking off of which was then considered an indispensable " bit of business " for " Goodman Delver," after he had already been put to death as an ambassador to the King of England!

Conscious of not being the " perfect lover " for a lady of Elizabeth's delicacy and accomplishment, the festive Dicky had entrusted his passion to the solemn ear of John Philip Kemble. He conveyed it to George Inchbald, who, in turn, confided it to Mrs Inchbald herself. Suett undoubtedly meant it seriously, but it was certainly not so received by its fair object. She burst into laughter not only at the thought of marrying her genial friend, but at that of changing even so unlovely a name as Inchbald for Suett!

The truth was, as may have been guessed, that, now her husband was gone, Elizabeth was only waiting for Kemble, the platonic ally of so many rambles and readings, to ask her to become his wife. In the plainest possible language, she confessed afterwards that she " would have jumped to have him." All their friends were not only expecting to hear the happy news every day, but wondering why it was even so long delayed. She waited in vain. Kemble, instead of naming the day without more ado, became distant, reserved, exasperatingly courteous. It does not appear that at this time he had any permanent intentions elsewhere, even towards his future Priscilla—though he had been the hero of numberless love affairs. It is just possible that, although there was still a certain amount of sentiment between them, Kemble and Mrs Inchbald had already found each other out. Mrs Inchbald herself must have seen through him, and known the self-love that underlay his undoubted manliness and high ideals and genuine grit. One gathers as much from her portrait of Dorriforth in *A Simple Story*. At the same time, it is pretty certain that Kemble, who would never brook a rival to himself by his own throne, would have found it very difficult to put up with the independence of mind and the freedom of action that Elizabeth demanded all through her life In short, they would most certainly have both wanted their own way, and a satisfactory

match for either could hardly have resulted without a desperate conflict, and a crushing defeat on one side or the other. Even as it was, though they remained friends to the end of their days, there were continual little controversies and coolnesses between them.

For the moment, however, all questions of the heart had to be laid aside for Elizabeth's urgent need of making progress in her calling. It is significant that even at this period, when she confessed herself " very unhappy," and finds it an important matter that Mr Kemble should " strike a spark from his flint to light and hand me into the coach," she was none the less devoting her leisure to working out farce-plots, many of which were to prove a good deal more useful than at the time she dared to hope. With Wilkinson also she had her differences—doubtless because he knew that, through her old friend Wilson, she was already negotiating for a chance at Covent Garden. For the time being, she rejoined the Edinburgh company, and met there a good many of her old friends. Mr Sterling, now a somewhat dwindled flame, was still, at any rate, ready to take up her time over a tea-cup; though now she was free his ardour had noticeably paled, and there was no mention of marriage. There was also a Mr Monson, whose behaviour " surprised " her; and a Mr Berkeley of Aberdeen, who even " shocked " her! In many ways it was a dark hour—happily only just before the dawn,—and that it was a pretty hard struggle even for a livelihood may be shown in the fact that she contented herself with lodgings at eight shillings a week. None the less, she was already contributing regularly to her sisters' upkeep.

Again, too, there are signs that she was troubled with religious doubts. She mentions having been to chapel only once while in Edinburgh, and her Roman Catholic friends were undoubtedly alarmed about her. This is shown in an intensely interesting letter sent by the famous Dr Alexander Geddes, not yet immersed in the controversy that was to rage over his *Critical Remarks on the Hebrew Scriptures*, to a lady who had written to him very especially about our heroine. There is no means of knowing who this lady was, but her intervention called forth an epistle which is worth giving in full, as being a general expression, as well as a particular

one, upon Roman Catholic principles in their bearing upon the stage :—

" I am," writes Dr Geddes, " very sensibly affected by what you tell me of Mrs Inchbald, though I hope her situation is not quite so dangerous as to you it appears. From the little I know of her, I take her to be a woman of good sense, elegant manners and gentle disposition ; and it would give me great pain to think that her principles as a Christian and a Catholic, did not entirely correspond with those amiable qualities. It is upon this very favourable idea which I have conceived of Mrs Inchbald, that I presume she will not take it amiss if I offer her, through your hands, my sentiments of her present state of life, and suggest the most effectual means of weaning her, by degrees, from that state, or making her live in it as becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ.

" I am none of those rigid casuists that deem it impossible for an actress to be a virtuous woman. I think, with St Francis de Sales, that a play is of itself an indifferent thing : I am even inclined to believe that a well-regulated theatre might become, if not absolutely a school of virtue, at least a source of rational entertainment, and one of the most harmless pastimes which the idle, the gay, and the great can indulge themselves in. At the same time I am fully convinced that, like all other indifferent things, it may be a real source of sin to many individuals ; and it is clear that, as often as that happens, these individuals are obliged to relinquish it, as they would be obliged to relinquish any other pastime or employment which from experience they had found capitally hurtful to their souls.

" If, then, Mrs Inchbald is conscious to herself that the theatre is, either directly or indirectly, to her the immediate or even remote cause of sin, she is surely too reasonable not to see the necessity of leaving it : but if she has never found it dangerous to her virtue, or incompatible with her Christian duties, I cannot well see that she is under an obligation of quitting it from any natural principle of moral rectitude I am acquainted with. To this perhaps it will be objected, that there are extant church canons by which all players are excommunicated, and which consequently suppose their profession altogether unlawful. I know, Madam, there are such canons, and I know also that these canons are founded on the supposition of the theatre being an unlawful amuse-

ment; but, in the first place, it is certain that when these canons were made the theatre was very different from what it is at present; and, secondly, it appears they are considered as obsolete, and not strictly binding, at least in this kingdom.

"I think I have heard you say that Mrs Inchbald herself was formerly admitted to the Holy Communion both by the English clergy and Bishop Hay, which it cannot be imagined they would ever have allowed, if they had not looked upon the canons so often mentioned, as gone into desuetude. Still, therefore, the danger or safety of Mrs Inchbald's situation must depend on the circumstances that attend it; and, with regard to these, we cannot reasonably refuse her own testimony. Hitherto I have supposed that Mrs Inchbald finds her state not only not detrimental to her virtue, but also compatible with every Christian observance. Now I am afraid this last part of the supposition is not sufficiently grounded; for I learn that she neither attends Mass on days of obligation, nor frequents the sacraments at times appointed. This non-observance must certainly be ascribed either to the employments she follows, the dissipations of which have left her no time for serious duty, or to her own tepidity and spiritual sloth, which hinder her to make a proper use of the times and opportunities which her profession allows. In either of these cases her situation is perilous, but surely not desperate. If the first be true, I cannot persuade myself that it will be a difficult matter to convince her of the propriety, expediency, and necessity of relinquishing a state that must in the end prove so fatal to her salvation: if the second, she has only to exert herself a little in the cause of virtue and religion and shake off that load of habitual indolence that oppresses her, and which will still be accumulating more weight in proportion as she neglects to remove it.

"'My dear Mrs Inchbald (would I say to her in such a situation), you profess yourself a Christian and a Catholic; and a woman of your education cannot be supposed to be ignorant of the duties which that sacred character imposes upon you. If the employment you now follow is incompatible with these duties, abandon it—for the sake of God, abandon it, and save your soul. But if you say that it is possible to attend to your obligations as a Christian and remain a player, show us that possibility, in the name of Heaven, by a conformable practice.'

"These, Madam, are the few reflections I have had leisure

to make on the subject of our last conference. If they are of any service to Mrs Inchbald, it will give me infinite pleasure. At any rate they can do no harm."

One may recall that the Bishop Hay referred to was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Daulis, and Vicar Apostolic of the lowland district of Scotland. He had had a life of adventure and of romance such as few present members of the Episcopal bench could boast. As an apprentice to a surgeon, he had served with the Young Pretender on the battlefield. He had been imprisoned in London, had been afterwards a chemist and a ship's surgeon, and, as successor to Bishop Grant, had narrowly escaped a violent death in the year before this very letter was written, when two Roman Catholic chapels were burnt and plundered by an infuriated mob. An extremely vigorous, broad-minded, and enlightened prelate, Bishop Hay had been in correspondence with Mrs Inchbald some seven years before, and she preserved a most kind letter from him in answer to one in which she had applied for his counsel. " It is," he had written in promising to see her personally, " my duty to be always ready when anyone wants me for spiritual concerns. You know the difficulty that those in your way lie under in regard to your Christian duties, but from the account you give there seem to be some favourable circumstances in your case."

Whatever may have been the result of these good endeavours on the part of her friends and distinguished counsellors, one gathers from her life itself that it was very much for the best. She was now, most certainly, to be yet more in need of spiritual encouragement than ever, for she was already preparing to plunge into the glamorous life of the London stage, set with pitfalls far more insidious than those afforded by the advances of humorous colleagues and provincial physicians. It was while she was enjoying promotion to a double salary—which was not much !—at York, that she received her engagement at Covent Garden from Thomas Harris, who was now in practically sole charge, after the resignation of his former co-director Colman, six years before. Just now, too, another and rather important lover made his appearance. This was a Colonel Glover, a military man of the highest character and excellent means,

whose suit seems to have been the most honourable and serious of any. There is little doubt that, had it not been for the fact that she was in love with Kemble, and was still hoping against hope that he would " do the right thing," Elizabeth would have accepted Colonel Glover. Glover would probably have made an admirable husband—as he was to prove a very faithful and sympathetic friend. He would have at once encouraged her ambitions, fostered her art, and given her absolute freedom. But it was not to be. That little ironist, Cupid, had willed that she should waste these precious years of youth and beauty—of the value of which she was fully conscious—over the phantom ideal which Kemble's " noble " qualities presented to her.

So, with all these memories behind her, and all these unfinished romances in her heart, we come with our Elizabeth to the goal of long desire, and to the most famous theatre of her world save only Drury Lane itself. True, from the grossly practical point of view her immediate prospects were not overwhelmingly good. Her salary was even less than Yorkshire afforded her, and she had to make a new reputation before audiences to whom she was utterly unknown, and who had not yet become used to her still faulty elocution. Very wisely she stayed at first with her sister Ann Hunt, who lived in a very humble way with her family. After a very nervous interview with Harris, she was chosen to play for her opening performance, in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*, the part of Bellario—the beautiful page who turns out to be Euphrasia in disguise. The choice pleased Elizabeth immensely. Not only is Bellario a charming Viola-like part in itself, but she had, as we know, an excellent figure for a boy.

Before, however, we see Mrs Inchbald make her first bow to a London audience, it would be well just to give some idea of the London theatre at that time, and of Covent Garden in particular. It was essentially a period of transition. Garrick was dead. The new life that was to come into the theatre with the august tragedy of Mrs Inchbald's own friends Mrs Siddons and Kemble, had not yet arrived. Sheridan had just been enthroned at Drury Lane, already idolised as the author of that supremely well-written—and, be it said, on its first performance supremely well-acted—comedy of manners, *The School for Scandal.* Small as the theatrical world of London

was, with its two " patent " theatres blocking out all rivalry, save that of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket (used only in the summer) and the King's Theatre, or rather opera-house, opposite, there is every sign that the London playhouses were more than sufficient for the public. A success at one was invariably held to excuse failure at the other. Outside the exclusive ring, Astley's and the Surrey were already devoted to concerts and circuses, and there were plenty of other odd-and-end places which managed to keep up an unsanctioned existence. But in the main it was sufficiently wonderful that a London which was no bigger than a small provincial town of these days, and a profession which was replenished still almost entirely by its own offspring with a sprinkling of Bohemians and runaway daughters and disinherited younger sons, should have produced and preserved a school of acting and of playcraft whose achievements are still classic, not only in the popular but in the worthier sense of the word.

Of the plays there will be an opportunity later on of saying something. It is well to remember even now that the acting of the patent-theatre companies at that time was, in brisk and bustling comedy, probably at a higher standard than it had ever been before or, possibly, has been since. Although Garrick had died the year before Mrs Inchbald's coming to town, the excellence of the " Garrick school " still pervaded both companies. A blend of grace and vitality—not correctly, perhaps, what we should call " naturalness "—was its prime quality. Garrick had ousted the stolid and pedantic declamation of Quin, still lingering, as we have seen, outside London in such actors as Digges. Whether even Garrick achieved anything quite like those extremely subtle and delicate "natural" effects that are possible on our present-day stage, the touches of " atmosphere," the infinity of suggestion possible in the slightest gesture or accent—the eloquence even of " the clicking of a door "—is very much to be doubted. He simply had not the organ to play upon that a modern producer and actor has with the present-day stage.

There were, for instance, as we familiarly know, no locks to any stage-doors until the time of Robertson, and, in most cases, no doors at all, but frank "wings." Carpets were unheard of. All the lighting effects were still of the crudest and

clumsiest, such as were provided by oil or candles. The times were still within the memory of playgoers when the audience actually crowded on to the stage, making any concerted " naturalism " practically impossible. Splendour and pageantry there was in plenty, but the niceties of comedy made feasible by a modern " solid set " were beyond reach. The dismissal of spectators from the stage itself had helped enormously in its gradual transformation from a platform into a " peep-show " or intentionally illusive scene. But there was still an extensive " apron " to the stage, with " proscenium doors " at the back of it on either side ; and the chief players still stood, to a great extent, with the audience—at any rate of the stage-boxes—at their sides as well as in front. In view of this, the frequent " asides," spoken, in fact as well as appearance, to the actual occupants of the stage-boxes, remained an enormously important, thoroughly justifiable, and in no way disconcerting, device of comedy.

The audience as such was noisy, ill-mannered, distracting, and—as is sufficiently shown by the frequent riots both before and after this time—tyrannical in its sense of authority over the actors. The gallery was still peopled very largely by footmen, who aped everything that was bad and very little that was good in the manners of the insolent " macaronis " of the day. The pit still came right down to the orchestra, and was an omnium gatherum of all classes, from orange-sellers to amateur, and in a certain measure professional, critics. These last, having no very large " circulations " to influence, though journalism was already beginning to have a responsible existence, were by no means averse to acquiring a reputation by audible criticisms at the expense of plays and players. Despite a vast improvement upon the Restoration state of affairs, the whole tone of the theatrical audience was far lower, both in morals and manners, than it is easy for us to conceive.

Amidst all this babble and traffic, the play depended—apart from the staple appeals of strong human emotions, alike in farce and drama—upon very different kinds of effect than those at which a modern comedy aims. There was, it is quite evident, very little of what one may call nervous appeal. The audience, being very much masters of the situation and quite at their ease, were a good deal more critical in some things, but a good

deal more patient in others. If an actor lost for a moment that intimate and exclusive hold upon the utmost sympathies, the absence of which " lets a play down " immediately nowadays, it did not so much matter. Strongly rhythmic speeches, even of a quite inordinate length, were tolerated, as we can see by the plays themselves, if only they were " justly delivered." The audience were having a good time. If an actor happened to interest them, they gave him particular attention ; if he did not, they talked with their next-door neighbour, or eyed the sparks and ogled the ladies. It did not so much matter if a particular play failed—indeed, it was by no means a universal occurrence for a new play to be " announced for repetition " ; and now and again a play was not allowed to be finished even on its first night.

On the other hand, to come to what was good in the Garrick school, these very difficulties accentuated the personal qualities of the comedian. He had to hold his audience by his own vitality to a much larger extent than the players of to-day. Probably one would have to look now in the music-hall if one would wish to find the definiteness, the personal appeal, and the absolute mastery of stock " business " which the eighteenth-century comedians had in their technical armoury. Again, the high comedian had a far more difficult task than his successor of to-day to be the " glass of fashion and the mould of form " which Garrick particularly was. To wear a sword and " show a leg " before an audience, quite a number of whose members had studied the art of deportment with the ardour of a religion, was a far more exacting test than that put to the modern young actor, who can lounge through a play with his hands in his pockets, and be considered highly accomplished so long as he can overcome stage-fright. For the ladies, Mrs Abington and Miss Farren and their sister toasts had to be mistresses of the last elaborations of finery. In days when ladies of social rank were to nothing like the same extent as they are now rivals in the cult of popular admiration, the ladies of the theatre were not perhaps the arbitresses, but undoubtedly the prime administrants of the mode. In a word, to purvey the " comedy of manners " (which subsisted right down to this time, for *The School for Scandal* was far more a belated flower than a rebirth) in a way that could interpret the world of the

Foppingtons and Lady Betty Modishes to itself, and to its own admiration, must have been an art that was as difficult in its accomplishment as it was instant and lavish in its reward.

Behind the scenes there had been, assuredly, great changes since the day when Garrick first stepped upon the stage, but the state of affairs was in many things a good deal nearer to that of the Restoration than to that of our own day. The "green room" was at the height of its glory as an institution. It was still encouraged as the haunt of the "smart set." With strict traditions and laws of their own, the "green rooms" of Drury Lane and Covent Garden were certainly more connected with the service of art than the average present-day night-club. But that they were exclusively "high-brow" salons is hardly to be imagined. Dr Johnson's famous reference to his temptations in the presence of Garrick's actresses would still have held good, and the days of sword-play, and sometimes actual bloodshed, over unsanctioned amours were by no means done. Certainly a pretty woman who made her arrival within the theatre walls was destined, under any circumstances, to be the recipient of constant and direct assaults upon her virtue, to be regarded not as surprising occurrences, but as in the natural course of events.

Happily, there is every reason to believe that there were actresses of that day who went through their whole careers unsullied by a breath of scandal. So far as anything beyond sentiment is concerned, Mrs Inchbald was one of these. But just to remind ourselves what this meant, it is right that we should be fully conscious how exceptional it was. It is right that we should remember, too, that our Elizabeth, who, though often racy and fearlessly sympathetic with the victims of that coarse and merciless age, never wrote or, so far as we know, spoke an immodest word, had undoubtedly to listen constantly, and at her peril without any sign of offence, to prurient insinuations and to language of the foulest order. Some even of Garrick's own apophthegms pronounced before an adoring company of both sexes, who chuckled over them for weeks and repeated them to the town, would be regarded by most of our hopeful young actresses of to-day, not, perhaps, as "shocking" (for the word seems to have passed away with Queen Victoria), but as merely disgusting.

It was to be cast directly into this environment that Mrs Inchbald—no longer the rural daffodilly that she was eight years before, but still young, still ardent, still fresh, charming, and virtuous, as she remained always—came to town. Of her immediate colleagues she must have known very few indeed as yet, save that faithful swain of her youthful days at Bury, Richard Wilson, who had got her the engagement. At the head of the Covent Garden company was now Henderson, who would probably have left a far greater name with us if he had not had the disadvantage of coming just between Garrick and Kemble. From what one reads of him—as well as from his portraits—it would seem that to some extent he anticipated Kean. A Cockney born, but of Irish and Scotch extraction, he was, like Kean, short, with a finely moulded head and neck, but a harsh voice. He was, again like Kean, at his best in fiercely passionate parts—Pierre in *Venice Preserved*, Iago, Posthumus, Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, and so on. He had also a strong sense of character, intelligence, humour, and judgment. He was a good Shylock, and a satisfying Falstaff. Garrick had paid him the compliment of jealousy. He had, among many remarkable qualities, an amazing memory, and could repeat long passages after having only read them through once. He had his faults—a clumsy figure and some bad mannerisms. None the less, he seems to have been a really great actor, with an intelligence considerably ahead of that of some of his critics. Although he died before forty, he had the honour of being buried in Westminster Abbey, and his wife, who is supposed by some to have poisoned him accidentally, was soon to follow him.

Then there was Lewis, the most sparkling, most volatile, and gayest of light comedians, the "Mercutio of the age," as Leigh Hunt called him. Apparently reckless in his mirth and animal spirits, but none the less an accomplished artist all the time, blending the graciousness of Barry with the energy of Garrick, he was just then at the very height of his powers, and fast eclipsing Quick, the original Tony Lumpkin, who was still a member of the company.

One must not forget, either, that Macklin, the "grand old man" of the stage, harsh, sardonic, quarrelsome, but with "a mind as tough and durable as his body," was still there to show

JOHN HENDERSON

From the painting by Gainsborough

to the youngest generation " the Jew that Shakespeare drew." He was already (according to one computation) ninety years old, but still he considered himself a member of the Covent Garden company. It was eight years before he was to give his farewell performance, and seventeen before he was to make his exit from the stage of life, possibly at the age of a hundred and seven, though he himself cut off ten years.

On the distaff side, the leading lady charged with the task of counteracting the charms of Mrs Abington, who was now at Drury Lane across the way, was Elizabeth Younge—otherwise Mrs Pope—who had been for so long Garrick's favourite colleague. It was she who played Cordelia to his Lear on the night before his farewell. It was she to whom he had said with a sigh, " Oh, Bess, this is the last time of my being your father ! " and she had answered, falling upon her knees, " Then, sir, pray give me a father's blessing ! " She does not seem to have been a woman of great genius, but showed all the fruits of Garrick's training, and was universally admired and respected. Occasionally, though not often, the lovely Mrs Yates, now retired from the stage, came to grace the scene.

For the romping hoydens dispensed to Drury Lane audiences by the joyous Dora Jordan in succession to Kitty Clive, there was Nan Catley, who, although the daughter of a humble public-house keeper, had a charming singing voice as well as an irresistible way with her, and displayed " a good deal of the careless boldness of Woffington." Mrs Mattocks, who was such a favourite with Queen Charlotte, was another invaluable member of the company for broadly comic feminine parts. As against this galaxy, Drury Lane had an undoubtedly strong team, all of them practised under the eye of Garrick : " Gentleman " Smith ; " Plausible " Jack Palmer (the ideal Joseph Surface, and in so many ways the Charles Hawtrey of his day) ; the elegant Miss Farren, soon to become Countess of Derby ; and Mrs Abington, who, as the original Lady Teazle, must have been happy enough to be relieved of the eternal enmity of Garrick, and to be flashing her fascinations under Sheridan's banner.

There was, however, one colleague of Mrs Inchbald's in the Covent Garden days whom we have already named, but of whom something should be said just now, for he is to become

very important before long. This was Thomas Holcroft, whose acquaintance she had made in her strolling days with her husband at Canterbury. Holcroft was, undoubtedly, one of the most amazing men of his generation—indeed, he seems quite out of place amidst the tinsel and tawdry relics of past elegance that were so largely represented in the little parish of the piazzas. Holcroft was a Chartist born before his time. He was the first influence in Mrs Inchbald's life with a direct relation to the new and infinitely broader ideals she was soon to come in touch with. The son of a pedlar who had originally been a shoemaker in Orange Court, Holcroft had been, before he joined the stage as an actor, a stable-boy at Newmarket, a cobbler with his father, a teacher in a small school at Liverpool, and himself the proprietor of a day-school in the country, where " for three months he lived upon buttermilk, and had but one scholar." Between whiles he had had as bitter an experience of Grub Street as Savage or Johnson himself, and had kept himself for a time as a journalist with contributions to the *Whitehall Evening Post*. Journalism, however, was a poor resource in those days, if not still ! At last, utterly destitute, he made the acquaintance of Macklin, who got him engaged as a prompter at Dublin. This led to many adventures with strolling companies in the provinces, till he found a humble opening at Drury Lane.

Almost entirely self-educated, Holcroft, with amazing industry and pertinacy, made himself master of French, German, and Italian. It was in the very year of Mrs Inchbald's joining the company that he published his first novel, *Alwyn, or The Gentleman Comedian*, largely autobiographical. In the next year his first comedy, called *Duplicity*, was produced at Covent Garden itself, with Mrs Inchbald in the cast. It was two years after this that he went to Paris and, with his friend Bonville, achieved the remarkable feat of memorising the whole of Beaumarchais' *Mariage de Figaro* without taking a single note. He then translated it with a view to its performance as *The Follies of a Day* at Covent Garden, where it was played with instant and most fruitful success.

This was only the beginning of his career. He was destined to write forty plays—among them one of the most triumphantly popular comedies of his age in *The Road to Ruin*. This gave

Lewis his famous comic character of Goldfinch, with its horsey jargon and catch-phrase " That's your sort ! " and brought out Munden in the strongly pathetic character of old Dornton, father of the wayward hero, and not unlike Mr Henry Arthur Jones's Puritan parent in *The Dancing Girl*. The play, which has been revived from time to time ever since, was doubly autobiographical. Goldfinch's talk must have been very much an echo of what Holcroft had to listen to as a boy at Newmarket, and, like old Dornton, Holcroft had to suffer the agonies of disappointed fatherhood. His dearly-loved son shot himself after having robbed him—curiously enough, too, his friend Macklin had an experience with his own son of much the same order.

Afterwards Holcroft was to distinguish himself by writing the first melodrama, frankly so-called, produced upon the English stage—that is to say, the first play in which dialogue spoken " through music " played an important part, for the original name of " melo-drame " was already shared by ballad operas. In France Rousseau is credited with having invented the notion, though it probably goes a good deal farther back. Anyhow, the arrival of *A Tale of Mystery*, adapted from the French and produced at Covent Garden when the nineteenth century was but a couple of years old, was the signal for a flood of similar pieces, which gradually developed, with the help of comic front-scenes of immemorial ancestry, into the melodramatic tradition we know so well.

With it all, the drama was only one interest in Holcroft's life. He was, from first to last, a revolutionary—very much inspired by the new ideas which had broken in upon the minds of so many Englishmen with the American Declaration of Independence, just four years before this time, and to be stimulated still more by the outburst of the French Revolution nine years after. Holcroft was later on to be indicted with Horne Tooke for high treason, and committed to Newgate, but ultimately discharged without a trial. His whole life is a record of intense originality, honesty, energy, courage, perseverance, and industry, struggling with perpetual misfortune and unsuccess in the matters that he had most at heart. He was a man of very great intelligence, if not of genius, and of implacable strength of purpose, but stern and irascible. His genuine enlightenment

was, too, disastrously mixed with certain " fads." He was a victim, for instance, of a " picture-dealing insanity," and of a belief that, as we are told by Mrs Shelley (whose father, William Godwin, was one of Holcroft's intimates), " death and disease existed only through the feebleness of man's mind, and pain also had no reality." " Rectitude and courage," she continues, " were the gods of his idolatry, but the defect of his temper rendered him a susceptible friend." As an actor, Holcroft was, according to one contemporary at any rate, " called bad because he was not noisy " ; and it was said that " old Harris had not brains enough to understand him."

Such were the colleagues among whom Mrs Inchbald found herself at this vital time for her and for the country at large—a time of kindred change both on the stage and elsewhere, when the outworn world of classicism was waking amidst throes of war and of rebellion to the long task of building up a new scheme for humanity—a task that was not to be accomplished nearly so easily as was then thought, and will take centuries yet ! It was a waking up from worship of the past to hope for the future. Mrs Inchbald herself belonged essentially, by her temperament as by her training, to the world of precedent. Yet she was destined to find henceforward nearly all her closest friends among the heralds of the new age, and to be much influenced by them. Young, beautiful, lovable, and infinitely desirous of being loved, she stood, " with reluctant feet," at the parting of the ways.

CHAPTER IV

" COMMENCING AUTHOR "

Elegance Under Difficulties—The Devout Lover—The Marquis of Carmarthen—At the Haymarket—" Description of Me "—Colman Accepts *The Mogul Tale*—Kemble Congratulates—*I'll Tell You What*—An Ode from *Peter Pindar*—Colonel Glover Proposes.

HENCEFORWARD it will not be so very much of Mrs Inchbald the actress that we shall hear, as of Mrs Inchbald in the cluster of other capacities that have done so much more to bring her name down to us. Her Covent Garden debut as Bellario was not, as a matter of fact, an earth-shaking success. Quite possibly it was not altogether an advantage that the tragic characters of Philaster and Arethusa were played by Lewis and Mrs Mattocks, both of whom, as we have seen, were essentially comedians. Also the remembered charms of Mrs Yates, the Bellario to whom Covent Garden had been used—and loyalty to their favourites was one, at any rate, of the not too numerous virtues of the audiences of that day—may have had some influence. The truth, however, should probably again be told that Mrs Inchbald herself, although a beautiful and conscientious actress, was not, under any circumstances, destined for greatness in that particular walk of life. Enough that she remained at Covent Garden, and proved herself at least a useful and agreeable member of the company—not only beautiful, but thoroughly competent to the extent of her elocutionary powers.

She was particularly noted for a simple but effective, and probably what we should now call an æsthetic, taste in dress, and her power to fulfil it at a ridiculously small expenditure, with the help of an ever-ready needle. Her salary was at first thirty-six shillings and eightpence a week, afterwards raised to two pounds, out of which she seems to have paid nine

shillings a week for her lodgings. None the less, despite her perpetual industry (for she was still keeping up her literary labours), and despite the humbleness of her domestic surroundings, she was still pursued by wooers—old and new.

Most devoted of all remained her old friend Wilson. He celebrated her first Christmas in London by sending her a letter so honest and sincere that one cannot forbear giving it in full. As it was he who had not only helped her to the stage originally, but had actually got her the introduction to Covent Garden, Wilson deserves at least this little space in her life's history.

> " I most earnestly entreat," he writes, " you will not take offence at my addressing you on a subject upon which my happiness so materially depends ; as it is a matter I have well considered before I could gather courage. I hope I shall not offend you by saying I sincerely love you, and will by a uniformity of conduct convince you how much I am attached to you. I have a great many faults, not one of which but is easily erased. I have unfortunately been acquainted with ladies who have had as many faults as myself, therefore a reform there was not to be expected. With you, should I ever be so happy, I would be everything you could wish me ; my conduct, in every respect, should be framed to your wish ; my whole life should be devoted to render you happy. For God's sake, whatever is my doom, do not let me lose your friendship. Honour me so far as to let me know my fate as early as possible : a state of suspense is of all states the most miserable. I know your prudence will not suffer you rashly to enter on a second marriage, without minutely deliberating on the consequences. Give me but leave to speak to you on this subject, and I shall then hope, by time, to convince you it is my wish to do everything that can render me worthy your attention."

To this " devoted friend and well-wisher," as he signed himself, Mrs Inchbald could only reply with a rejection that was evidently meant to be decisive. It did not have the effect of silencing the devout Richard. As his reply betrays not only what was in her own letter, but is a very revealing sidelight upon her character as well as his own, it, too, is worth preserving :—

" I hope you will believe me, when I assure you I have had a very uncomfortable night, in consequence of the letter I sent you. I was out this morning before your answer came ; I returned at eleven and found it. So far from alleviating my passion, it has increased it. Your letter breathes the spirit of virtue and good sense, and makes me more conscious of your inestimable worth. You say your temper is uncertain, and that ' nothing but a blind affection in the husband could bear with it.' I think the man that is honoured with your hand must be totally blind to his own happiness, if he could not overlook and humour an infirmity of that kind, to secure so many lasting virtues. I will allow the loss of a worthy, loving, and attentive husband, is not soon to be reconciled to a lady who thinks and feels with that goodness of heart that you do ; and that the hazard in venturing on a second is great. I will confess, that I have not conducted myself through life with that degree of prudence and discretion, that your late worthy husband did ; but this I will be bold to say, that my heart is good ; so is my temper. I feel with you I could be every thing you would wish to mould me to, and know no pleasure without you. Only give me leave (in hopes your present sentiments may remove) to convince you, your friends, and the world, in time, by my deportment, that I have no wish on earth but that is centred in you. As to worldly matters I will not presume to enter on that subject, till I dare flatter myself with the smallest part of your esteem : that once gained, I will venture to say I will never forfeit it."

What her reply to this was we do not know. From the fact that Wilson sent her as a Christmas present *The History of England*, together with a hearty wish that she should be " married to a good husband, before this day twelve months," it is quite evident that in losing an accepted lover she did not lose a friend. So ended the hopes of one whose fidelity never wavered—indeed, a little while after this we find Wilson engaged in using his best interests with Harris, the manager, to put on one of those farces which Mrs Inchbald had, as we know, in her portmanteau. Already she was in touch with Colman at the Haymarket, and sent him in vain a farce called *The Ancient Law*, probably on the old Massinger theme that everybody should be put to death at seventy, as cumbering the ground.

For the time being there was nothing for it but to go on with

the work that brought her the very necessary bread-and-butter, although there are continual signs that she grew more and more disappointed with her efforts as an actress. There were undoubtedly unkind critics who made no secret of the faults that clung to her. Her stuttering was still talked of. She was described in one quarter as " only fit for the Queen of Sheba " ; and the same malevolent personage, whose name has not been handed down to history, told Mr Harris, the moment her mouth opened on the first night she played, that she " was not worth a farthing," and that " he had been taken in." There were, too, many drudgeries which she hated—none more than her old aversion of walking on in pantomine. Her slim figure continued to be used more often than she evidently wished for male parts of a not very exalted nature—such, for instance, as Ben Budge, one of Macheath's disreputable associates in *The Beggar's Opera*.

One great delight she had quite early in her career as an actress at Covent Garden, that of appearing as Lady Touchwood in Mrs Cowley's delightful play, *The Belle's Stratagem*, which was produced very soon after her arrival, has remained in favour ever since, and is still popular for special amateur performances. Lewis was the original Doricourt—and made a big though not very characteristic success in the famous scene of pretended madness which afforded the late Sir Henry Irving one of his early London triumphs. Meanwhile Wilson was by no means the only one of her persistent would-be lovers to employ her leisure with those friendly refusals. Dr Brodie was indefatigable. Indeed, on one occasion he had to be refused her door, and on forcing his way up to the dining-room, to be indignantly turned out. But he seems to have been not by any means the only medical man in the field. We hear of Dr Grey, her London medical adviser, high-mindedly refusing to accept any fee for attending so beautiful—and virtuous—a lady. Davis, also, was constant in his humbler devotions.

By far the most exciting experience of this time from the social point of view was her appearance at a masquerade, in her stage dress as Bellario, attended by the Marquis of Carmarthen ! This escapade caused no little chatter at the time, and her sisters showed especial signs of alarm. But the

entire innocence of the whole venture is made quite clear in the light of its recountal, under very slightly differing circumstances, in a chapter of her novel *A Simple Story*. We there find the heroine, at that time nothing worse than a high-spirited, self-willed, frivolous girl, exasperating her awesome guardian by going to a masquerade, in direct defiance of his wishes, dressed as the goddess Diana, whose costume was not unnaturally mistaken by observers below stairs as that of a boy. But of this we may hear later.

Enough, so far as the noble Marquis is concerned, that directly his attentions showed signs of transgressing the point where honour is called in question, Mrs Inchbald herself ceased to encourage them. Kemble, although he continued to write courteously, now entirely desisted from any warmer emotion. He was still in Yorkshire, and Mrs Inchbald kept a characteristic letter from him asking her to convey to him the secret of the success of Henderson in the character of Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*.

> " What kind of hat does Mr Henderson wear ? What kind of wig—of cravat—of ruffles—of clothes—of stockings, with or without embroidered clocks ?—square or round-toed shoes ? I shall be uneasy if I have not an idea of his dress, even to the shape of his buckles, and what rings he wears on his hands."

Kemble also " begs " that Mrs Inchbald will " explain " to him how Sir Giles can be said to " flourish his sword " and shortly after describe it as " glued to his scabbard with wronged orphans' tears." The truth seems to be that the merit of Henderson's performance, which, in this ferociously emotional part, was a good deal better and more passionate than Kemble's, lay not in his cravat or in his buckles, but in his genius. Indeed, Boaden goes so far as to say that " Henderson seldom cared much about dress," but could " inform any clothing with vital character and passion." Moreover, the simple answer to the sword problem—and one possibly which might have been arrived at even without Mrs Inchbald's assistance—was that the sword was flourished scabbard and all. Mrs Inchbald's answer was not preserved. One cannot help feeling that she must have experienced just the faintest little

spark of triumph over her neglectful idol in realising that, whatever his future glories were to prove at Covent Garden itself (thanks, as it happened, to her agency), she could, at any rate, boast of having got there first!

So time went on with not many memorable events for some four years. We hear of the same moderate but never wholly satisfying progress as an actress, of the same alternation in wooers, of summer seasons at the Haymarket, of a visit to Ireland, where Daly, the Dublin manager, made disgraceful proposals to her, and was duly repelled. After a couple of years Mrs Siddons arrived at Drury Lane to establish herself immediately as the greatest actress of the day. Kemble followed a year later. But Mrs Inchbald herself was still just a charming and useful actress of no particular distinction. All the while she was working hard at her plays, and at her reading. Most of it was very serious indeed—as, for instance, Rollin's *Ancient History*, Hume's *Essays*, the *Letters* of Voltaire, *Paradise Lost*, *The Wars of Jugurtha*, and translations of Homer, Tasso, Ovid, Plato, and Lucian.

From time to time she changed her abode from cheap lodging to cheap lodging, but her happiest early refuge was undoubtedly one in Leicester Court, which was in Castle Street, abutting upon what was then Leicester Fields and is now Leicester Square. She had a little room here which was quiet, with a paved courtyard, and very cheap. It was sufficiently pleasing for Kemble to take her place there when she was away from town. Like Bobadil at poor Cobb's, " he found the cabin was convenient."

With what courage—at a time when comparative opulence would have been easy enough at the cost of her self-esteem—she faced a life of very narrow means, blended of hard work on the one side and social popularity on the other, is revealed interestingly just now in her diary. She admits that in order to send her remittances to her sisters out of the slender margin from a two-pounds-a-week salary, she used to dine whenever possible at the house of a friend, Mrs Whitfield, who was in easier circumstances. When she did not happen to be invited there, she just did not dine at all! Mrs Whitfield, it may be added, also proved herself a friend in need by lending her house when she was out of town or when Mrs Inchbald wanted an

impressive venue for interviews with managers and other great ones.

At every point Mrs Inchbald set a lesson to her sisters of the stage in economy and in good taste. It is significant that she was the first actress to appear with her natural hair, unpowdered, upon the stage. She could not, to be sure, abolish the huge and hideous erections which just then gave a fine lady's head the appearance of " an equilateral triangle, of which the base was uppermost." Still, to be rid of the " larded meal " was something !

This innovation happened at the Haymarket, where her relations with Colman, the manager, and with her fellow-players seem to have been on the whole comparatively happy. That from the moral point of view the ladies of the theatre were not a little in need of Elizabeth's never priggish example is sufficiently shown in a delightful little anecdote recorded in her diary.

> " To have fixed the degrees and shades," she writes, " of female virtue possessed at this time by the actresses of the Haymarket Theatre, would have been employment for an able casuist. One evening, about half an hour before the curtain was drawn up, some accident having happened in the dressing-room of one of the actresses, a woman of known intrigue, she ran in haste to the dressing-room of Mrs Wells, to finish the business of her toilet. Mrs Wells, who was the mistress of the well-known Captain Topham, shocked at the intrusion of a reprobated woman, who had a worse character than herself, quitted her own room, and ran to Miss Farren's, crying, ' What would Captain Topham say, if I were to remain in such company ? ' No sooner had she entered the room, to which as an asylum she had fled, than Miss Farren flew out at the door, repeating, ' What would Lord Derby say, if I should be seen in such company ? ' "

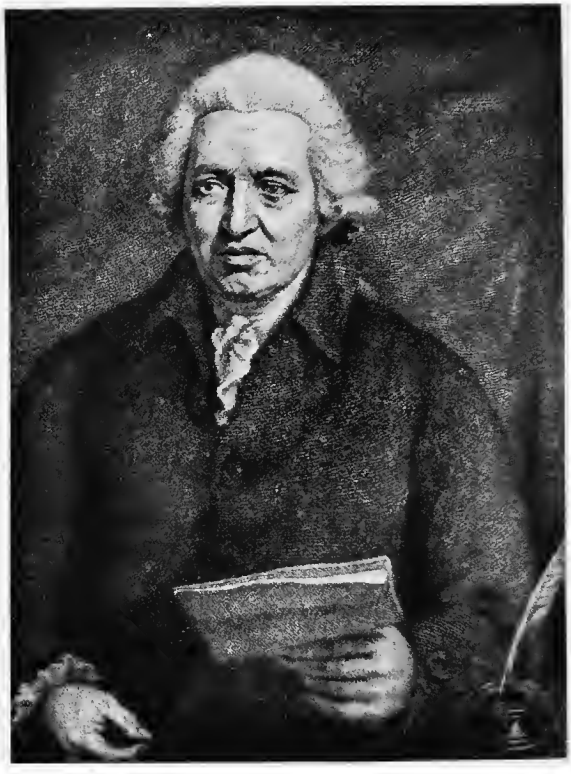
The little comedy was carried on, Mrs Inchbald tells us, until refuge was found in the dressing-room of a lady who was at any rate supposed to be respectably married, but, Mrs Inchbald believes, " not very accurately." All through her sorrows and privations Mrs Inchbald never lost her sprightliness and sense of humour. Indeed, it is well that here one should give the piquant description of herself " endorsed " by herself

and written by "an admirer," which was found among her papers. It is, since one may take it at any rate as representing her own view, an autoportrait which reveals not only her outward personality in its very candid facts, but not a little of her inward character in the very "endorsement." It is called—

"A Description of Me.

Age . .	Between thirty and forty, which, in the register of a lady's birth, means a little turned thirty.
Height .	Above the middle size, and rather tall.
Figure .	Handsome, and striking in its general air, but a little too stiff and erect.
Shape .	Rather too fond of sharp angles.
Skin . .	By nature fair, though a little freckled, and with a tinge of sand, which is the colour of her eye-lashes, but made coarse by ill-treatment upon her cheeks and arms.
Bosom .	None; or so diminutive, that it's like a needle in a bottle of hay.
Hair . .	Of a sandy auburn, and rather too straight as well as thin.
Face . .	Beautiful in effect, and beautiful in every feature.
Countenance	Full of spirit and sweetness, excessively interesting, and, without indelicacy, voluptuous.
Dress .	Always becoming; and very seldom worth so much as eight-pence."

Despite all this cheery acceptance of things as they were, her sorrows were many. To add to them, while she was still struggling to keep her little taper alight amidst the splendour that glowed around the names of her friends Mrs Siddons and Kemble, Elizabeth's good and loving—if sometimes stern—mother died at her old home at Standingfield. Mrs Inchbald was only able to hasten down into Suffolk to visit the grave, and pass a couple of days with such of her brothers and sisters as remained there. Happily, she had been able to pay a flying visit to her mother not long before; but it must have been a matter of keen regret to her that the worthy old lady had not



CHARLES MACKLIN

From a contemporary print

been spared to see the fulfilment that was to come of some, at any rate, of her daughter's ambitions. Elizabeth's actor-brother George—who had, as we have seen, never proved a very popular figure upon the stage—took over the farm. He was not a success even as a farmer, and came to an unfortunate end, of which we shall hear in due time.

Very soon, happily, the darkness was to brighten into dawn for our heroine as well as for her more famous playmates of the old York days. After countless disappointments—at one time " Jupiter " Harris had got as far as advancing her twenty guineas on one of her farces, but the piece was never produced—Colman accepted a little farce that she had written on the spur of the moment, inspired by the craze for ballooning, which was just then very much in vogue, owing largely to the exploits in Paris of Blanchard, the first balloonist to cross the English Channel. Mrs Inchbald was lucky enough, too, to anticipate the far greater excitement that was caused in London itself only a month after the production of her play by the ascent of Lunardi in the presence of the Prince of Wales and a vast crowd of Londoners, and the exhibition of his balloon in the Strand. Mrs Inchbald's fancy easily supplied a plot for the occasion. She called her little play *The Mogul Tale*, and imagined some more or less comic adventurers from Wapping making their way in a balloon to the domains of the Great Mogul, and even entering the sacred precincts of his seraglio. There were some songs to it, but these were nothing very great.

No sooner was Colman's interest in the little play awakened, than he pressed its production forward with a good deal more energy than Goldsmith had to thank him for when the genial but foolish little manager maddened him with delay and distrust over the production of *She Stoops to Conquer*. Colman evidently liked *The Mogul Tale* from the first. He revised it considerably himself, and, among other things, took the utmost care that the identity of its authoress should not be divulged. It seems quite certain that this was not out of a grudging of credit, but out of genuine kindness to Mrs Inchbald, who appeared in it herself, and whose prospects would have suffered, not only as authoress, but as actress as well, if the trifle had failed. Even as it was, the comic impersonation

of the Pope by one of her characters brought a lampoon, with the signature of " Father Paul," which ran :—

> " A rank Papist born and a rank Papist bred,
> By penances humbled, by my doctrines fed—
> The Pope you burlesque, and to theatres cramm'd :
> Your farce has been saved—but you will be d——d ! "

From the first *The Mogul Tale* was what is nowadays called a " winner," and Colman made not the slightest attempt to withhold either fame or more material reward from the quarter where it was due. The play ran for ten days—quite a long run for those times—and Colman himself made up the takings from the customary " author's benefit " to a hundred guineas altogether.

From this moment Mrs Inchbald emerged from being a mediocre actress to being at least a celebrated authoress. Her name was on everybody's mouth in the little world of the London theatres. Among all the gratifying tributes that she received, none can well have been more subtly pleasing to her pride than the characteristically pompous effusion which even the ineffable Kemble indited from Liverpool, where he was then touring. He is evidently still full of self-love—possibly more so than ever—a fact revealed from his very first sentence to his last. Hardly a thought is devoted to the ostensible theme, and *The Mogul Tale* is not even named :—

> " Next to your self, nobody can be more inclined to think highly of your productions than I am ; but, alas ! my poetical days, I believe, are gone by. In my best pretensions, I was but an indifferent rhymer ; nor in my vainest moments ever thought any thing I did fit to be called poetry. I have ransacked my brains for apt parallels, but to no purpose. I cannot pay you a compliment in verse too high for what I truly think of you in prose ; and I might tell you, that poetry is too essentially fictitious to answer the real purposes of real esteem, and to express deserved praise. The fault, however, at present, is in me, not in the art. I repeated you some lines of my translation from Ovid, when I was in town. I thought to have finished the Epistle in the country ; but no such thing. I have laboured and laboured so long in vain at it, that it is now thrown aside from an absolute conscience of wasting so much time to no manner of purpose. The

truth is, my health declines every day. I have neither spirits (in which I never abounded) nor genius (of which inclination, perhaps, wholly supplied the place) to attempt any thing for my improvement in polite letters. You know me, I believe, well enough to feel for me when I say, that with all my ambition I am afraid I shall live and die a common fellow. Your regular and continent life gives you the assurance of many healthful years ; and your uncommon talents, having now forced themselves into notice, will crown you with growing reputation. If I could write, I would : I cannot—so you must receive esteem instead of flattery, and sincerity for wit, when I swear there is no woman I more truly admire, nor any man whose abilities I more highly esteem."

Amidst the joy of her creative triumph—a triumph which, as we have seen, Kemble in his heart could not but envy as one who had essayed graver composition in vain—it was characteristic of Elizabeth that the first people she thought of were those who, she felt, were in need of her help. As always, she leaves behind in her diary definite figures, even down to the shillings. This was out of no vainglory on her part, one feels sure, but merely as a matter of habit, born of an existence in which every penny mattered.

Out of the hundred guineas she first of all paid her humble friend, poor Davis—or rather settled with herself after paying him—a long-owed bill for forty-three pounds eighteen shillings due for his professional services as hairdresser. Since Davis had for so long lived in the same house, and shared so often her tea, and dinner, and supper—such as these were,—it is well to emphasise the exclusively professional nature of these services. But it is to be remembered that Davis was in great demand at the theatres for hairdressing purposes. He was in many respects the Clarkson of the day. He attended not only Mrs Inchbald, but Mrs Abington at Drury Lane, who was the popularly acknowledged dictatress of taste in these matters, and Miss Younge, who was Mrs Inchbald's leading colleague at Covent Garden. Probably these major goddesses of the stage paid him quite liberally. Yet, until this time, he appears to have served Mrs Inchbald no less efficiently for love—a love which was not, and could not be, fully returned.

Perhaps it was an inevitable result of Mrs Inchbald's sudden emergence into the light of fame that she began to be talked about in connection with yet another lover. He was one of whom she undoubtedly had serious thoughts, though, one fears, from purely social reasons. This was Sir Charles Bunbury, a scion of a famous Suffolk family. He was M.P. for the county, and if only on that account might have been justified in becoming an admiring patron of our brilliant daughter of Suffolk. Bunbury, who will appear again and had been formerly the husband of the Lady Sarah Lennox, whom George III. so much admired, had been for some time undoubtedly very useful to Mrs Inchbald, both by his advice and by his influence. He had helped to get her a licence for the play which Harris had once intended to produce, and now he is mentioned as calling upon her frequently, and as being seen about with her. In his case, however, as in the others, there is not the remotest reason for believing that she allowed herself to listen to any vows not made at the altar. She still—as always—resented a look that displeased her, though she was very far from being straitlaced, and was beloved at the theatre, where affected prudery of any sort would not have been tolerated for a moment. Even " Jupiter " Harris, Covent Garden's manager, had sued in vain, but bore her no ill-will. " That woman, Inchbald," he said, in his coarse fashion, " has solemnly devoted herself to virtue and a garret ! "

Naturally enough, having her drawer stocked already with comedies and farces that had been returned unappreciated from the shelves of managers, and her head teeming with ideas, she set feverishly to work upon enriching the stage with more fruits of her fancy. She also took the liberty of reminding Colman that he had even then a comedy of hers in his possession which she had sent him some time before anonymously—or rather under the name of " Mrs Woodley." Being past making any pretences at having done his duty as a conscientious play-reading manager, he said he would go home immediately and find and read it.

No sooner did he read it than he liked it. No sooner did he like it than he determined to produce it ; and no sooner did he determine to produce it than he looked around to discover a suitable title, for in those days it was the agreeable habit of

managers to christen plays at the last moment—generally at the author's suggestion, but by no means always. Colman, in this instance, had what he considered a happy idea, and a posterity which has quite forgotten the play is not likely to take the trouble to say him nay. One can see easily enough how it arose. " I'll tell you what, . . ." he began. " That's a funny title ! " said somebody. " A title ? Good idea ! let's have it for a title ! " And so it came to pass. " If you will call," wrote Colman, making the inevitable joke, " *I'll tell you what* the title shall be." *I'll Tell You What* accordingly became the name of the play, which was duly produced at the Haymarket, and proved an even greater success than the far less serious *Mogul Tale*, for it ran for no less than twenty nights with great applause, this being considerably longer than was the usual dramatic span at that time.

It was a *comédie larmoyante* of a somewhat risky order, though its moral was entirely good. It told of the adventures of a wife —Mrs Euston, very badly acted by Miss Farren, who was quite out of her element in pathetic parts—who, with two children depending upon her, is driven by want to the dreadful expedient of pretending to be a woman of ill-fame, in the hope that she may meet with some man of a sufficiently noble nature to take pity on her misfortune. She is finally rescued by her father. It is a state of affairs curiously reminiscent of one of those Terentian comedies of Mrs Inchbald's mediæval forerunner Hroswitha, the tenth-century nun of Gandersheim. But we may be pretty sure that Mrs Inchbald knew nothing of this.

The ethics of the theme were canvassed in a good many quarters, particularly as Mrs Inchbald had seen to it that there should be plenty of sprightly comedy amidst its poignancies. There can be no doubt, however, that in her heart Mrs Inchbald, who, during those first ten days in London and afterwards, had had personal experience of the temptations and struggles of forlorn and poverty-stricken beauty, felt for her exiled sisters in a way that the comfortable critics of her play could not well understand. The play was graced, it should be said, with a prologue and epilogue, both of them written by Colman himself. They were, indeed, among the last offsprings of his pen, for he was very shortly to come to the end of his dramatic career, to be succeeded by his more brilliant if equally erratic son.

Among the ironical little incidents of success which now attended Mrs Inchbald like the genie of the ring was the fact that her salary as an actress was increased by a pound a week. Little though it seems to matter here and now, it meant undoubtedly a very great deal to her then. It enabled her, for instance, to lodge slightly better in Hart Street, where she paid at first ten and sixpence, and afterwards fifteen shillings. Among others of the many friends who, as the way of the world is, now flocked round her, one of the most honest and valuable was Francis Twiss, the compiler of the first concordance to Shakespeare. After cherishing a hopeless passion for Mrs Siddons, he had ultimately married Sarah's sister Fanny, and is described as a " grim-visaged, gaunt figure, but a kind-hearted gentleman and profound scholar." The Sunday dinners which Mrs Inchbald was in the habit of consuming with him were rational in every sense of the word. While others were flattering, Twiss was good friend enough to tell Mrs Inchbald the sobering truth. In some extravagant eulogiums, *I'll Tell You What* had been compared to *The School for Scandal*; but we find the excellent Twiss exhorting Elizabeth to pay no attention to this " insulting nonsense." He told her frankly that it was a " pretty, light, summer piece, likely to pay her very well for the time and anxiety " she had undergone, but nothing more than that. Twiss, by the way, not Kemble, as is generally supposed, was the first of her friends to make a habit of dubbing Mrs Inchbald " The Muse "—a name which clung to her for the rest of her life. It helps us to understand that her friendships were always inspiring, whether sentimental or no. In all of them she seems to have been what we should call a " good pal."

Despite the wise cautioning of this excellent friend, the year that brought her out as a dramatist was, not unnaturally, the wildest and maddest, if not the merriest, year in all Elizabeth Inchbald's life. Although she never lost her head, the excitements of fame had an immediate effect upon her health. We hear of constant headaches, sickness, and faintness. She changed her lodgings to the second floor of a house in Great Russell Street, which had been Button's Coffee House, beloved of Addison—a considerable promotion for her. Here, between literary labours and her performances on the stage itself—for

as yet she continued to appear as actress for bread-and-butter reasons, though without any added distinction—she must have found little leisure to be conscious of that sense of loneliness which always lay in the background. She continued to be besieged by would-be lovers. Sir Charles Bunbury called three or four times a week ; but as his aim was all too palpably to pluck the rose unenhanced by the orange blossom, he was refused the door as often as he was admitted. Davis, as ever, was guilty from time to time of too enthusiastic advances, and had to be repelled, though forgiven for old times' sake.

One entertaining admirer over whom Mrs Inchbald never had any searchings of heart, but whose attitude quite evidently was not that of contented friendship, was Dr Wolcot, the celebrated " Peter Pindar." He addressed to her some verses which must be given for their suggestion of Elizabeth's attractiveness, however mistaken they were, and however offensive they may sound in modern ears :—

" Eliza, when with female art
You seem to shun, and yet pursue,
You act a false, a soulless part,
Unworthy love, unworthy you.

Reluctance kills the rising bliss ;
Half-granted favours I disdain ;
Those honey'd lips that I would kiss,
Are gall, unless they kiss again.

No passive love, that silent takes
All I can give without return :
Be mine the frame that passion shakes,
The liquid eye, the lips that burn.

Desires that mantle in the face,
Wishes that wait not to be won,
The living, dying, rapt embrace,—
Give these delights, or give me none ! "

Unfortunately—one feels that one must say unfortunately !—it was just at this time of bewildered triumph that our heroine received the best, and soundest, and, alike from the material and moral point of view, most satisfactory of all her many offers of marriage—that, namely, from the Colonel Glover whom we have already met. He was a good, respectable man, and

honestly in love with her, and was able to offer her not only a very desirable match, but a settlement of £500 a year and control of a ménage that included a carriage. But she refused him. Although one does not gather that she had yet, or ever did, overcome her fondness for Kemble—indeed, she confesses that at all times she would have taken him, but he never proposed,—she was probably still hoping, complete happiness being out of her reach, to arrange the consolation of a fashionable marriage with Sir Charles Bunbury. This at least would have given her a presentation at Court, rank, and a position among the " nobility and gentry," to the temptations of which our Elizabeth's temperament was always susceptible. So, in the very midst of gaiety and of new hope, the little tragedy of negation happened almost without anyone knowing it—even its leading character herself. The still lovely votaress passed on—not, to be sure, in maiden meditation, but very much preoccupied with the distractions of the giddy world around her, fancy free.

CHAPTER V

PLAYWRIGHT AND NOVELIST

A Frugal Lady Bountiful—Romps at Forty!—More Plays—*Such Things Are*—*Everyone Has His Fault*—*The Massacre*—Her Novels—*A Simple Story*—*Nature and Art*—Favour from the Great—More Fruits of Success.

Now that we have launched Elizabeth as authoress—and very soon, indeed, she gave up acting altogether—it would be best, perhaps, to leave the year-to-year recountal of her doings, and come directly to the chief fruits of her labours. Henceforward, full of characteristic little romances as her career was, of distinguished friendships, and of keen interest in everything that happened around her, her way of life did not alter very much. She moved from lodging to lodging—from Great Russell Street she moved to Frith Street in Soho, to be near her friend Jack Bannister, the actor of Drury Lane, and his wife. She rarely left London, and never for long. She was eminently businesslike in her dealings with managers, and got remarkably good money, as things went then, for her plays—as much as £900 in all for one, namely, *Such Things Are*. But she continued to combine prudence and generosity in a way that has nowhere its exact parallel.

Though scrupulously careful of her self-respect, she spent as little as she possibly could on her own comfort, devoting a much-grudged pittance to her daily needs, and dressing, though always becomingly, on next to nothing. Almost everything she could spare for herself she saved and put into the Funds, bringing annuities which at last gave her a modest independence of a little over £200 a year. At the same time she was supporting, after a while, practically the whole of her family. Her gifts to them were the first to be set aside with

every little windfall, and her ability to do this was, as her diary shows, the greatest and truest of all her joys.

As so often happens when any member of a struggling household achieves a modest affluence, nearly all of them became in time sufficiently in distress to be eligible candidates for Elizabeth's bounty. Her sister Dolly, whose husband died shortly after Elizabeth arrived in the arena of dramatic fame, had gone back to Standingfield; but as George did not get on too well with the farm, she afterwards drifted to London, and, naturally enough, into the care of "Sister Inchbald." After a while she became barmaid at the "Staple Inn" Coffee House, kept by Elizabeth's friend, Bob Whitfield, where Mrs Inchbald often visited her. Debby, who was even prettier than Mrs Inchbald, came to London too—also as a barmaid,—but seems to have gone lamentably astray, and caused her famous sister considerable trouble, not only on monetary grounds. None the less, Elizabeth's purse was always open to her, even when her door could not be. It goes without saying that the two sons of her reputably "excellent" husband were habitual pensioners.

With all these burdens upon her, and no happy home life to fall back upon, Mrs Inchbald still kept up in the most amazing way the sparkle of her temperament. A delightful story is told of her—indeed, she herself confesses to it—of how one evening, when she had been supping with Mrs Whitfield, the two ladies and young Whitfield went for a walk. "I," she admits with characteristic candour, "rapped at doors in New Street and King Street, and ran away!" How many distinguished lady dramatists on the verge of forty would have enough romp left in them to do that, one wonders!

Of her early plays—although there is no need to quarrel about whether it is to be called the "best," or not—undoubtedly the most profitable and memorable was her drama upon the character of a worthily honoured contemporary, John Howard, the prison reformer. This was the above-mentioned *Such Things Are*—an altogether remarkable play, anticipating Brieux in its introduction of a definite social thesis, based upon practical blue-book facts, into an alternatively thrilling, lively, pathetic, and picturesque comedy-drama.

The good philanthropist had now been for well over ten years engaged upon his self-imposed task of visiting prisons and

redressing the wrongs of their inmates. No one, however, had yet thought of bringing this sort of genuine heroism in amongst the plumes and sententious rhodomontade which went by the name of tragedy on the eighteenth-century stage. Although so far ahead of her age in her instinct for real values, Elizabeth knew her own time too well, and had too great a sympathy with it, not to gild the pill of realism with a considerable amount of merriment and far-fetched glamour. She took her story away to far-off Sumatra, where she imagines a Sultan who was not—even in the play—the real Sultan at all, but a kind of Angelo who had usurped his place and filled the prisons with captives.

Among these motley victims a Mr Haswell is represented as making his way with a view to mitigating their sufferings, and, in cases where justice had been outraged, achieving their deliverance at the Sultan's hands. While he is about this business, Haswell has his pocket-book stolen by a slave who, to shift the suspicion, encounters Haswell and solicits at his hand yet further aid. Haswell instantly obliges. Overwhelmed with his benevolence, the slave suddenly throws himself down on his knees, restores the pocket-book, and pleads for forgiveness.

Even an audience that had grown very used to sudden expressions of magnanimity on the part of slaves and savages, broke into such applause over this scene as was said at the time of its production to have been " never yet exceeded in a theatre." The straightforward pathos of the main plot was relieved by some cheery, not to say Gilbertian, episodes concerned with a very different visitor to Sumatra,—one Twineall, an adventurer of the frankest type, who had been introduced to the local governor and his wife, Sir Luke and Lady Tremor. He had been told that Sir Luke was a dauntless, fire-eating warrior, and his wife a descendant from Malcolm, King of Scotland, and one who was incapable of seeing merit in anyone not of high birth. In reality Lady Tremor was a vulgarian of the worst order, and Sir Luke a trembling coward, who had been disgraced because, like the Duke of Plaza Toro, he had been a little too much to the fore in a " strategic retreat " upon a recent battlefield. Twineall manages to avoid all difficulties by persistent flattery, even to the extent of asserting to his jailer when

thrown into prison that he " could not think of going in before him."

From the rise of the curtain right to the finish, this forerunner of all modern social-thesis drama was a triumph—a fact which was soon clinched by the honour of a visit from the King and Queen themselves. It was the first time that the stage had been used—not for political propaganda, for that was an old friend—but for appealing to the theatrical world with life as it is lived, a dramatic ideal which Mrs Inchbald had already to some extent essayed in *I'll Tell You What.* The eighteenth-century world had had plenty of plays—such as *George Barnwell*—preaching platitudes of respectability. But a drama even indirectly in support of a definite social campaign was a new thing.

Whether Mrs Inchbald herself was fully conscious of this is very doubtful. She was still too much a child of her time to understand the full value, for other than popular purposes, of anything to which the words " lofty," " sublime," and, worst of all, " elevating," were not those that sprang to the lips of praise. But the fact remains that her own life and her own observations, and the friends and would-be lovers who were now gathering around her, nearly all helped to encourage this flavour of social reform in the serious side of her work, both as a dramatist and afterwards, as we shall see, as a novelist. The very title, *Such Things Are*, was, in its way, a challenge not merely to the state of affairs in sunny Sumatra. It arraigned that also in the prisons of London itself, which were, if we are to judge by Howard's own work, hardly less in need of purgation. For present purposes, like all of Mrs Inchbald's plays, it may be confessed that *Such Things Are* is couched in too obviously stilted an eighteenth-century jargon for toleration by an average audience. Mrs Inchbald could devise bright comedy-scenes, but her dialogue never had that natural, brisk staccato which her predecessor, Mrs Centlivre—undoubtedly a finer dramatist,—had at command.

Out of the score of plays by Mrs Inchbald that still survive, many are the merest farces ; some are adaptations from the French of Le Texier, who was soon to become another of her admiring friends ; and some, like *Lovers' Vows* and *The Wise Men of the East*, sentimental dramas adapted from the German of Kotzebue—adaptations at third hand, for Mrs Inchbald

did not, of course, know German herself. Perhaps the best of all her lighter productions were her frank comedies of manners, *Everyone Has His Fault* and *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are*. In both of them we have the old story of prodigal sons and daughters, and stern fathers reconciled after a lively plot of misunderstandings. In both the scenes are as brisk as could be ; but the dialogue is undoubtedly heavy for these times. The characters, with their transparent names, Mr Placid, Mr Solace, Mr Harmony, Lady Mary Raffle, Mr Bronzeley, and so on, are types rather than creations—though Mr Harmony, who reconciles all the jarring characters to each other in *Everyone Has His Fault*, and is a kind of incarnation of universal goodwill, was hailed as " original " and " new to the stage."

Quite late in life, and after the turn of the century, she was to compose a tragedy (in prose) called *The Massacre*. It is a ghastly thing, dealing with French Revolution atrocities in " a city of France, sixty miles from the capital," and detailing an orgy of slaughter in which the hero's mother is killed, he being shown the knife it was done with, still " warm and reeking " with her blood, while infants are described as having murdered other infants in their cradles. The play, which only differs from a modern Grand-Guignol " thriller " in the fact that the worst of the horrors happen off the stage, was a natural product in a mind like Mrs Inchbald's of the time she lived in, just as the news of some of the " massacres " in the Great War have brought forth such plays as Maeterlinck's *Burgomaster of Stilemonde*. *The Massacre* is not a great work of art, and was never produced, though it was included in Boaden's memoir ; but as yet another effort after realism on Mrs Inchbald's part it is worth mentioning.

For the present we must hasten on to what was beyond all question a more abiding fruit than any of her plays, namely, her really great novel, *A Simple Story*. This, as we have seen, she had begun during her married life under the encouragement of Kemble. The curious fact that it breaks completely in two may quite possibly—not to say probably—have some bearing upon the sudden difference of relationship that arrived when Mr Inchbald died. It had had many adventures. It had been submitted again and again in various quarters and in various

stages of completion, but in vain. It was not until Mrs Inchbald was already a famous dramatist that it found its ultimate patron in George Robinson, the publisher, founder of the firm that became Rivington's (later merged in Longman's), and described afterwards by Mrs Inchbald as "the best friend" she ever had. Having made a good profit out of the books of some of her plays, he offered her two hundred pounds for the copyright.

There is no mistaking the truth that *A Simple Story* was a quite marvellous work for a hitherto absolutely untutored young novelist. That it in many ways inspired *Jane Eyre* is almost certain; and it is excellent above all in the fact that it *is* "a simple story," sincere right through, and based not merely on art, but on life. Its great fault is a curious gap of sixteen years in the middle. This can hardly be excused on the score of *A Winter's Tale*, for, although mother and daughter are, respectively, the heroines in the two parts of *A Simple Story*, the mother has—alas!—no chance of coming to life again to see her daughter's happiness. Moreover, there does not seem to be any exact reason for this double generation of heroines. The moral remains the same, and the character of the daughter, though it does not repeat that of the mother, hardly intensifies the point of view. In short, the whole of the second part is something of an anti-climax. None the less, it is indubitably to the second part that we owe the Charlotte Brontë inspiration. So—if for that alone—it was worth having.

There is very little doubt that in Miss Milner, the heroine of the first part, as in the Lady Matilda who takes her place in the second, Mrs Inchbald was tracing the various facets of her own nature, and recalling a good many of the incidents of her own early life. In Dorriforth, who remains from beginning to end the hero—or, at any rate, the dominating character—it is equally evident that Mrs Inchbald was drawing a portrait, flattering in some things, otherwise unsparing in its insight, of Kemble himself. Dorriforth had been, like Kemble, trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood, but devoted himself to the care of a dead friend's daughter, Miss Milner—we do not know her Christian name. From the first Mrs Inchbald shows him to us very much for the self-righteous prig he turns out to be, incapable of sympathising with the

" real propensities " of his ward's high-spirited temperament and wildly nurtured mind. His faults, however, he bore beneath an outer personality " framed to captivate as well as to command."

> " His figure was tall and elegant, but his face, except for a pair of dark bright eyes, a set of white teeth, and a graceful arrangement of his clerical curls of brown hair, had not one feature to excite admiration. Yet sometimes a gleam of sensibility was diffused over each, so that many persons admired his visage as completely handsome, and all were more or less attracted by it. . . . On his countenance his thoughts were portrayed ; and as his mind was enriched with every virtue that could make it valuable, so was his face adorned with every expression of those virtues. They not only gave a lustre to his aspect, but added an harmonious sound to all he uttered ; it was persuasive, it was perfect eloquence ; whilst in his looks you beheld his thoughts moving with his lips, and ever coinciding with what he said."

Miss Milner—as befits a piece of self-revelation on Elizabeth's own part—is more minutely studied. She was eighteen at the time the story begins, and " very beautiful," but at the same time " very young,"—" idle, indiscreet, and giddy, with half a dozen lovers in her suite ; some coxcombs, others men of gallantry, some single and others married." She had, none the less, her excellent qualities. She was good-hearted to a fault. We hear, for instance, that her father before his death had been owed a sum of money by a certain Mrs Hillgrave. " The late Mr Milner," so Mrs Hillgrave told Dorriforth, " was determined to seize upon all our effects. His daughter, however, by her intercessions procured us time in order to discharge the debt ; and when her father was no longer to be dissuaded from his intention, she secretly sold some of her most valuable ornaments to satisfy his demand, and screen us from its consequences."

The great fault in Miss Milner was vanity, a folly of which Mrs Inchbald herself was always fully conscious. Miss Milner had been from her earliest years told that she was beautiful. She had, moreover, been too frequently told the high value of that beauty, and " thought every moment passed in wasteful idleness during which she was not gaining some new conquest."

" She had a quick sensibility, which too frequently discovered itself in the immediate resentment of injuries or neglect. . . . There was but one passion which then held a place in her bosom, and that was vanity ; vanity defined into all the species of pride, vainglory, self-approbation; an inordinate desire for admiration, and an immoderate enjoyment of the art of pleasing, for her own individual happiness, and not for the happiness of others."

This vanity, we hear, did not only concern her physical charms—possibly another little bit of self-understanding on Elizabeth's part. We read that Miss Milner had

> " acquired the dangerous character of a wit, to which she had no real pretensions, although the most discerning critic, hearing her converse, might fall into this mistake. Her replies had all the effect of repartee, not because she possessed those qualities which can properly be called wit, but because what she said was delivered with an energy, an instantaneous and powerful conception of the sentiment, joined with a real or a well-counterfeited simplicity, a quick turn of the eye, and an arch smile. Her words were but the words of others, and, like those of others, put into common sentences ; but the delivery made them pass for wit, as grace in an ill-proportioned figure will often make it pass for symmetry."

The " simple story " which Mrs Inchbald has to tell us is that of the utter incapability of one of these characters to understand the other, and the infinitely piteous consequences of Dorriforth's self-centred narrow-mindedness. One need not go through all the many exciting incidents that were destined to happen when Dorriforth found himself under the same roof with his charming and, as we have seen, highly temperamental ward. There is a duel which Dorriforth himself fights with a dashing but dissipated peer of the period, Lord Frederick, who offers Miss Milner attentions which remind one inevitably of the Sir Charles Bunbury of real life. There is also a visit to a masquerade in defiance of Dorriforth, which was quite obviously suggested by the escapade with the Marquis of Carmarthen already referred to.

All through, in spite of her defiance, the psychological plot of the story centres in the fact that Miss Milner was in love with Dorriforth. Yet in the perversity of her nature she felt a kind of enjoyment in making him think that she was a captive

in Lord Frederick's train. She was at heart, we are expressly told, entirely innocent. Hers was a kind of love which could not be regarded as sacrilege even in view of Dorriforth's vows as a priest.

> " Let not the reader imagine," writes Mrs Inchbald, " that there was in that ardent expectation one idea which the most spotless mind, in love, might not have indulged without reproach. Sincere love (at least among the delicate of the female sex) is often gratified by that degree of enjoyment, or rather forbearance, which would be torture in the pursuit of any other passion. Real, delicate, and restrained love, such as Miss Milner's, was indulged in the sight of the object only ; and having bounded her wishes by her hopes, the height of her happiness was limited to a conversation in which no other but themselves took a part."

There is, it should be said, in the household a relentless enemy of Miss Milner, who loses no opportunity of poisoning Dorriforth's mind against her, in a Mr Sandford, an extremely astute Jesuit, whom Miss Milner was unable either to ingratiate or deceive. It is difficult to trace his actual original amongst Elizabeth's definite intimates. Several of her spiritual advisers might have sat for the portrait, and, as we have seen, Mrs Inchbald's attitude towards the sterner doctrines of her Church was not always that of a readily obedient daughter.

Suddenly matters are brought to a head by Dorriforth's succeeding to the peerage and being given—as has sometimes happened in the case of noblemen without an heir—a special dispensation to marry. Dorriforth—or Lord Elmwood, as he must henceforth be called—has now his chance of setting everything to rights between himself and Miss Milner. Indeed, he becomes formally engaged to her. It is now, however, that the terrible business of the masquerade shows her self-will to him in a light that he was quite incapable of understanding—the blend of passionate love and equally passionate independence.

After a long tiff Lord Elmwood and Miss Milner are at last reconciled and duly married. So far as the average novel serves as an example, Mrs Inchbald might quite easily have devoted her last page to the rapture of wedding-bells. For some reason or other, however, she seems to have been impelled to a kind of conscientiousness that suggests an anticipation of

Ibsen himself! Instead of winding up with the usual hymeneal, Mrs Inchbald deliberately casts optimism aside in the last two lines of her marriage chapter. " After the sacred ceremony was over," she tells us, " Miss Milner felt an excruciating shock when, looking on the ring Lord Elmwood had put upon her finger, she perceived it was a—mourning ring! "

From this point we skip over seventeen years, to find to our consternation that, to use Mrs Inchbald's own words, " the beautiful, the beloved Miss Milner is no longer beautiful—no longer beloved—no longer—tremble while you read it!—no longer—virtuous." Hardly less disastrous has been the effect of the interval upon Dorriforth. " Dorriforth, the pious, the good, the tender Dorriforth, is become a hard-hearted tyrant."

The change had happened, we discover, after " four years' enjoyment of the most perfect happiness that marriage could give." By that time Lord Elmwood had become the father of a beautiful daughter, whom he loved " with a tenderness almost equal to his love of her mother." But he had to go away to visit his estates in the West Indies. " Lady Elmwood," we read, " at first only unhappy, became at last provoked." Then, giving way to that irritable disposition which she had so seldom governed, she resolved, in spite of her husband's injunctions, to " divert the melancholy hours his absence caused by mixing in the gay circles of London." Here it was that she found refuge from " tedious solitude " in the " dangerous society of one depraved by fashionable vices "—none other, it may be guessed, than Lord Frederick, now the Duke of Avon. His mistress she had already become when Lord Elmwood arrives home. Elmwood fights a duel with the Duke, whom he leaves " so defaced with scars as never again to endanger the honour of a husband."

Meanwhile Lady Elmwood died, in a lonely country-house on the borders of Scotland, by the side of a dreary heath. She was alone in the world save that

> " on the other side of the bed sits Sandford—his hair grown white—his face wrinkled with age—his heart the same as ever—the reprover, the enemy of the vain, the idle, and the wicked, but the friend and comforter of the forlorn and miserable.

" Upon those features where sarcasm, reproach, and anger dwelt, to threaten and alarm the sinner, mildness, tenderness, and pity beamed, to support and console the penitent. Compassion changed his language, and softened all those harsh tones that used to denounce perdition.

" ' In the name of God,' said he to Lady Elmwood, ' of that God, who suffered for you, and, suffering, knew and pitied all our weaknesses—by him, who has given his word to take compassion on the sinner's tears, I bid you hope for mercy. By that innocence in which you once lived, be comforted. By the sorrows you have known since your degradation, hope, that in some measure, at least, you have atoned. By the sincerity that shone upon your youthful face when I joined your hands, and those thousand virtues you have since given proofs of, trust that you were not born to die the death of the wicked.'

" As he spoke these words of consolation, her trembling hand clasped his—her dying eyes darted a ray of brightness—but her failing voice endeavoured in vain to articulate. At length, fixing her looks upon her daughter as their last dear object, she was just understood to utter the word ' Father.'

" ' I understand you,' replied Sandford, ' and by all that influence I ever had over him, by my prayers, my tears ' (and they flowed as he spoke), ' I will implore him to own his child.' "

So we become introduced to the second heroine of the story, Lady Matilda. Sandford's attitude towards her is entirely contrary to that which he had seen fit to adopt towards her mother in earlier days. He is now the defender and protector. Lord Elmwood, grim as little Lord Fauntleroy's old grandfather himself, at first refused to have anything to do with his daughter, beyond providing for her maintenance. After a while, however, at Sandford's earnest plea, he relents so far as to allow the girl to live at his country-house on the strictest condition that under no circumstances shall she ever present herself before him. She is to keep in one wing of the house when he is there, and never to let him even see her on pain of instant dismissal.

From now onward the whole story takes a happier turn, though there are plenty of thrilling incidents. Once Matilda met the old Earl accidentally on the stairs ; but, although he

did not enforce his threat, he took no notice of her, and was still "implacable." Matilda is, as it happens, not the only young person to whom Lord Elmwood is in this awe-inspiring position. There is a nephew, Rushbrook by name (the maiden name, one may remember, of Mrs Inchbald's mother), who was the unsanctioned offspring of one of his brothers. With this young man Lady Matilda, who is represented as being just as beautiful as her mother, but of a less erratic temperament, strikes up a friendship which soon ripens into love, honestly returned on his part. Lord Elmwood, in his pompous, curmudgeonly manner, will not at first recognise the affair at all. But the old man's truer and better nature bursts out at the finish, when Matilda is kidnapped by a sort of Lord Frederick of the younger generation, named Lord Margrave.

Directly Lord Elmwood hears what has happened, he throws over all his reserve and superior pose and shows the stuff that is in him. He takes his pistols, and, with Rushbrook, who had "begged, with all the earnestness he felt, to be permitted to accompany his uncle," dashes in pursuit. He arrives just in time to find young Margrave in the act of making a brutal assault upon the defenceless Matilda, and rescues her with very little difficulty.

So all ends happily. After a merely playful recurrence of his old manner, Lord Elmwood not only smiles upon the tenderness between Rushbrook and Matilda, but by a little turn of comedy almost throws them into each other's arms, with a fortune into the bargain—just as in a fairy-story. "I boldly told him of my presumptuous love," says Rushbrook, explaining to Matilda why Lord Elmwood had sent him to her, "and he has given to you alone the power over my happiness or misery."

> "Whether the heart of Matilda," adds Mrs Inchbald, in the little homily she gives us by way of tag, "could sentence him to misery, the reader is left to surmise; and, if it could not, he has every reason to suppose that their wedded life was a life of happiness. He has beheld the pernicious effects of an improper education in the destiny which attended the unthinking Miss Milner. On the opposite side, what may not be hoped from that school of prudence, though of adversity, in which Matilda was bred?

" And Mr Milner, Matilda's grandfather, had better have given his fortune to a distant branch of his family, as Matilda's father once meant to do, so that he had given to his daughter A PROPER EDUCATION."

What exactly Mrs Inchbald means by a " proper education " is not, one must confess, absolutely clear. It may be a challenge to the parade of useless accomplishments and the cultivation of an unnaturally timid and blushful demeanour in the presence of the male species which was so often considered an " education " among girls of that period. It may mean that Miss Milner was spoiled by flattery, and by being allowed to have her own way. It may mean just that Elizabeth herself, who had had no education at all, viewed what she had missed (in the way so many people who have gone through the same experience are still inclined to do) as a panacea for all ills. One thing, at any rate, is pretty certain—namely, that Mrs Inchbald had been deeply impressed, though in rather a vague sort of way, by Rousseau, whose *Confessions* she had begun to translate, and whose *Émile* she had probably read. When one thinks of her amazing labours in the long task of self-culture, one cannot help wondering what she might not have done with the education that would be open to her now. With that impulse of intelligent ambition perpetually urging her on, even a poor farmer's daughter, as she was, would have a chance of making her way by scholarships through High School and University to the top of more than one tree. But whether this is exactly the kind of education that Mrs Inchbald—or Rousseau—meant, is a very different matter.

Despite the fault of its broken back, and the disastrous fate of its elder heroine, *A Simple Story* instantly caught the taste of the reading public. A second issue was demanded within a month, and, although the old book may not be much asked for modernly at the libraries, it has been sufficiently popular within memory for a new edition to have been brought out only thirteen years ago.

Meanwhile Elizabeth continued her busy, frugal life, perpetually besieged with friends and admirers, but still more or less happily her own mistress. Among her chief intimates just at this time was, curiously enough, Mrs Wells, the fellow-member of the Covent Garden and Haymarket com-

panies, of whom we have already heard as having been openly and unashamedly the mistress of Captain Topham.

There seem undoubtedly to have been some good points, among the many bad, about this Mrs Wells, or Mrs Inchbald would not have been so friendly with her. She was a constant cause of trouble, and the Topham connection had distinct inconveniences in view of Mrs Inchbald's more respectable acquaintances. But it did help to bring her in touch with a lively and interesting set of people, and also may have helped a little to her celebrity in ways that are not altogether unknown even now. For Topham, who was a man of birth, and had commanded a troop of Guards, was a pioneer in what may be called genuine society journalism, written " by gentlemen for gentlemen." With the Rev. Charles Este, an " Old Westminster " who was one of the royal chaplains, a man of science and of great mental and personal activity, he started an expressly social daily paper called *The World*, mostly written by Este, whom the printer never saw, but who during the day was " everywhere that a gentleman of taste could be," and forwarded each night the harvest of a quiet eye upon fashionable folk and their doings.

This highly elegant sheet had an enormous vogue, and brought a fortune to its promoters. In its pages Mrs Inchbald herself figured a good deal under the sobriquet, which was no disguise to her friends, of " The Muse." It was thanks to her friends of *The World* that Mrs Inchbald was to be found amongst the celebrities who attended at Westminster Hall to hear the impeachment of Hastings. Among other less stern interludes amidst the toils of the theatre and the writing-desk, we hear of a jaunt to Bagnigge Wells—a resort close to Sadler's Wells, familiarised to us by Sir Arthur Pinero's *Trelawny* play, and at that time by no means of the highest reputation. We hear of her having a fish-dinner at Billingsgate, and returning by water—a pleasanter adventure than it would be now. At another time she goes into the city to " have her fortune told."

Not only did she make just now, as was only natural, a host of new friends, but, inevitably, although she was now past forty, several new suitors made their appearance. More important than this, she herself fell, or pretended to fall, over head and ears in love with her doctor—the famous Dr

Warren. Although he was the King's physician and had the most remunerative practice known up to that time in the profession, bringing in something like £9000 a year, Dr Warren took especial pains over his lovely patient and attended assiduously to her slightest disorder. Such was her adoration of this worthy physician, despite the fact that he was already married and had a large family, that she confesses having walked up and down Sackville Street in the dark in the hope of seeing his light in the window, and, after waiting in for him all day, having rushed out at the back when he rapped at the front door. At one time she bought a portrait of him in a shop, and records in her diary " read, worked, and looked at my print." Probably this hero-worship of a man who was undoubtedly one of the ornaments of his profession, had a good deal of sheer fantasy about it; but there it is—part of her character!

There was also yet another doctor—she seems to have been on curiously good terms with medical men—who was a frequent visitor at her rooms in what is now Leicester Square, exactly opposite Sir Joshua Reynolds' house, to which she moved from Frith Street. This was a Dr Gisborne, for whom she had a considerable regard; but their friendship appears to have been untroubled with sentiment so far as he was concerned. We read in her diary that he " took a dish of tea, stayed long, and spoke much of marrying, but not me!"

It was now, too, that her old friend Holcroft, being a widower some ten years her senior, betrayed a sudden and surprisingly fierce flame of passion, considering that they had been both theatrical and literary comrades for so many years, and that Mrs Inchbald had by no means always approved of his revolutionary pamphlets. Holcroft, who married four times in all, not only began boldly to pose as a would-be husband for Elizabeth, but wrote her poetry with all the ardour of a boy of seventeen. Happily this storm of passion abated before long, and friendship was resumed.

Yet another admirer—openly gallant but never, apparently, transgressing the freedom permissible to a married man—was George Hardinge, the barrister, who was, on the whole, a most useful and respectful counsellor. He was evidently permitted to address " The Muse " in terms which, to anybody

who did not know, would suggest something more than a purely platonic flirtation.

At one time he upbraids her for not having noticed him in St James's Park. "You had on your black muslin," writes he, "had a little umbrella in your hand, and a little dumpy woman in white as a foil. I passed as close to you as I am now to my pen, and you would not appear to know me." At another he admits to jealousy of Sir Charles Bunbury, whose siege of our heroine had by no means ceased. "I thought," he says, "Sir Charles looked yellow in the House of Commons last night, and when I arrived at home I saw the reason in your *billet-doux* to me. The fairies told him that he was less beloved than me; and though I saw him fast asleep, I could easily discover that his dreams were feverish."

Over Dr Warren, of Mrs Inchbald's real (or pretended) admiration for whom he was fully aware, Hardinge was more concerned than jealous, and even allowed himself to make inquiries from time to time on Mrs Inchbald's behalf as to the physician's health. In one of his bulletins, telling Elizabeth that Warren had recovered from an extremely slight and distinctly unromantic disorder, Hardinge rather surprisingly demands a "kiss in your answer," and invites himself to breakfast, promising, presumably with some knowledge of her frugality, to "bring a roll with me in my pocket." However, that there was nothing really irregular in Hardinge's friendship is shown in the fact that Mrs Hardinge wrote her letters couched in almost exactly the same terms.

Among other new friends was Sir (then Mr) Thomas Lawrence, who was introduced to her by Mrs Siddons, then unrivalled in his regard by her daughters. To him Elizabeth sat for her portrait. Kemble, though never again on the same cheerily intimate footing as in the old Blind-Man's-Buff days, took her to visit the Marquis of Abercorn. More important, however, than any grand acquaintances was the gravest of all her male friends—that strange impersonation of restless and overburdened intellect, William Godwin. As Holcroft's close companion and sympathiser in the great movement for intellectual freedom that was then striking its roots into English society, the author of *Political Justice* came not only to know, but to be, as he would say, "conscious of some tenderness"

towards Elizabeth. Whether he would have admitted that it was love may be doubted. Either way, considering his professed antagonism at that time to marriage as an institution, it is quite evident that he was hardly likely to be more satisfactory from this point of view than Sir Charles Bunbury himself.

Like Holcroft, Godwin had helped Mrs Inchbald with her *Simple Story*—perhaps he had a part in inspiring those closing words upon education,—but it is clear from their subsequent relationship that Mrs Inchbald never quite understood him. Certainly she did not go to anything like the lengths he demanded over the various causes in which, if not always wise, he was so courageous a pioneer. Mrs Inchbald undoubtedly —whether through wounded vanity or no—bitterly resented his marriage afterwards to Mary Wollstonecraft. Godwin accused her of being unfair to that amazing woman, and although there was a certain amount of reconciliation after her death, Mrs Inchbald and Godwin were never quite happy in their friendship again.

Meanwhile, despite the growing popularity of *A Simple Story*, Mrs Inchbald was not forgetting her other craft of playwriting. She was in high request now, not only at Covent Garden and the Haymarket, but at Drury Lane as well. She had what may well have been thought the very flattering honour of being asked by Sheridan to write a play for the incomparable Dora Jordan. Mrs Inchbald was both an easy and an amazingly rapid worker—on one occasion she had shut herself up in her little room and turned out a full-fledged comedy from the French, *The Child of Nature*, adapted from Mme Genlis' *Zélie*, in ten days. So with no great difficulty she produced *The Wedding Day*. It was a very gay little comedy, in which Mrs Jordan appeared as Lady Contest, a Lady-Teazle-like young wife from the country, whom old Sir Adam Contest, supposing himself a widower, had married more or less at random in order to disinherit his son. The original Lady Contest, however, turns up—she had not been drowned after all. The cheery heroine, so far from regretting the lady's recurrence, welcomes her cordially, tells her (as was the case) that Sir Adam had already bored her with the praises of the " dear departed," and promises the audience that her next

husband will be of her own age, and that she will hold her wedding ring sacred even if it should " pinch her finger." *The Wedding Day*, which had the distinction rare in any case, and above all with Sheridan, of being paid for before production, had a most happy reception, was extremely well acted, and brought Mrs Inchbald all sorts of fresh fame and favour.

Under these circumstances, Elizabeth was heartened to write another novel, not quite so good as *A Simple Story*, but still well worth reading and full of interest to anyone who cares about studying that wonderful time between the old world and the new, linked all unconsciously as they were in Mrs Inchbald's personality. This was *Nature and Art*, written and published just five years after her first effort as a storyteller. It is in its structure rather a formal story, with its direct contrasts of rich and poor, fortunate and ill-fated, and may have been to some extent suggested by a little comedy she had adapted from two French plays, *Le Dissipateur* and *L'Indigent*, and called *Next-Door Neighbours*. It tells of two brothers—one of them a feckless fiddler, large-hearted and unselfish, and the other a self-centred time-server, who, after living on his despised brother without a qualm, becomes a dignitary of the Church and marries into the peerage.

Like *A Simple Story*, *Nature and Art* carries its purpose to the second generation. The son of the worldly-wise cleric gets on, like his father, and becomes a judge. The fiddler, who, after having been treated with unspeakable meanness by his ecclesiastical relative, emigrates to Africa, has also a son, whom he sends back to England to be educated with the future judge. The young African is represented as having one of those white-sheet minds so fascinating to an age that still dreamed of Rousseau's noble savage as an ideal.

There are some delightful little talks between the Colonial innocent and the accomplished Dean, of which at least some snatches are worth giving. They have now and then an almost Shavian clarity of reasoning.

> " In addition," we read, " to his ignorant conversation upon many topics, young Henry had an incorrigible misconception and misapplication of many words. His father

had but few opportunities of discoursing with him, upon account of his attendance at the court of the savages, and, not having books in the island, he had consequently many words to learn of this country's language, when he arrived in England. This task his retentive memory made easy to him ; but his childish inattention to their proper signification, still made his want of education conspicuous. He would call compliments, lies—reserve he would call pride—stateliness, affectation—and for the words war and battle, he constantly substituted the word massacre.

" 'Sir,' said William to his father, one morning as he entered the room, ' do you hear how the cannons are firing, and the bells ringing ? '

" ' Then I dare say,' cried Henry, ' there has been another massacre.'

" The Dean called to him in anger, ' Will you never learn the right use of words ? You mean to say a battle ! '

" ' Then what is a massacre ? ' cried the frightened but still curious Henry.

" ' A massacre,' replied his uncle, ' is when a number of people are slain—— '

" ' I thought,' returned Henry, ' soldiers had been people ! '

" ' You interrupted me,' said the Dean, ' before I finished my sentence. Certainly, both soldiers and sailors are people, but they engage to die by their own free will and consent.'

" ' What ! all of them ? '

" ' Most of them.'

" ' But the rest are massacred ? '

" The Dean answered, ' The number who go to battle unwillingly, and by force, are few ; and for the others, they have previously sold their lives to the state.'

" ' For what ? '

" ' For soldiers' and sailors' pay.'

" ' My father used to tell me, we must not take away our own lives ; but he forgot to tell me we might sell them for others to take away.'

" ' William,' said the Dean to his son, his patience tired with his nephew's persevering nonsense, ' explain to your cousin the difference between a battle and a massacre.'

" ' A massacre,' said William, rising from his seat, and fixing his eyes alternately upon his father, his mother, and the Bishop (all of whom were present) for their approbation,

rather than the person's to whom his instructions were to be addressed—' A massacre,' said William, ' is when human beings are slain, who have it not in their power to defend themselves.'

" ' Dear cousin William,' said Henry, ' that must ever be the case with everyone who is killed.'

" After a short hesitation, William replied—

" ' In massacres, people are put to death for no crime, but merely because they are objects of suspicion.'

" ' But in battle,' said Henry, ' the persons put to death are not even suspected.'

" The Bishop now condescended to end this disputation, by saying emphatically :

" ' Consider, young savage, that in battle neither the infant, the aged, the sick, nor infirm, are involved, but only those in the full prime of health and vigour.'

" As this argument came from so great and reverend a man as the Bishop, Henry was obliged, by a frown from his uncle, to submit, as one refuted ; although he had an answer at the veriest tip of his tongue, which it was torture to him not to utter. What he wished to say must ever remain a secret. The church has its terrors as well as the law ; and Henry was awed by the Dean's tremendous wig, as much as Paternoster Row is awed by the attorney-general."

There was another pregnant conversation over a pamphlet the Dean had written, which " glowed with the Dean's love for his country."

" Such a country," we read, " as he described, it was impossible not to love. ' Salubrious air, fertile fields, wood, water, corn, grass, sheep, oxen, fish, fowl, fruit and vegetables,' were dispensed with the most prodigal hand ; ' valiant men, virtuous women ; statesmen wise and just ; tradesmen abounding in merchandise and money ; husbandmen possessing peace, ease, plenty ; and all ranks liberty.' This brilliant description, while the Dean read the work to his family, so charmed poor Henry, that he repeatedly cried out : ' I am glad I came to this country.' "

It so happened that, a few days later, Lady Clementina, the Dean's wife, found fault with the dinner. Accordingly another discussion came about.

" ' Indeed, you are too nice,' the Dean said to her. ' Reflect upon the hundreds of poor creatures who have not a morsel or a drop of anything to subsist upon, except bread and water ; and even of the first a scanty allowance, but for which they are obliged to toil six days in a week, from sun to sun.'

" ' Pray, uncle,' cried Henry, ' in what country do these poor people live ? '

" ' In this country,' replied the Dean.

" Henry rose from his chair, ran to the chimney-piece, took up his uncle's pamphlet, and said, ' I don't remember your mentioning them here.'

" ' Perhaps I have not,' answered the Dean coolly.

" Still Henry turned over each leaf of the book ; but he could meet only with luxurious details of ' the fruits of the earth, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea.'

" ' Why, here is provision enough for all the people,' said Henry : " why should they want ? Why do not they go and take some of these things ? '

" ' They must not,' said the Dean, ' unless they were their own.'

" ' What, uncle ! does no part of the earth, nor anything which the earth produces, belong to the poor ? '

" ' Certainly not ! '

" ' Why did not you say so then in your pamphlet ? '

" ' Because it is what everybody knows.'

" ' Oh, then, what you have said in your pamphlet is only what—nobody knows.'

" There appeared to the Dean, in the delivery of this sentence, a satirical acrimony, which his irritability as an author could but ill forgive."

As might be expected, the two cousins develop very much on the lines of their fathers, in character as well as in career. William not only becomes a brilliant lawyer, and the youngest judge upon the bench, but in the course of doing so has betrayed and brutally deserted a poor girl of the village, Agnes Primrose. Her letter to him, not daring to confess, or to trouble him with the fact, that a baby is about to arrive, has something agonisingly simple and pathetic about it. It shows in itself the breadth and tenderness of Mrs Inchbald's sympathy with the poor, in spite of all her frank personal preference for the elegancies of the town.

" Sir," runs the letter, " I am sorry you have so much to do, and should be ashamed if you put it off to write to me. I have not been at all well this winter—I never before passed such a one in all my life, and I hope you will never know such a one yourself in regard to not being happy—I should be sorry if you did—think I would rather go through it again myself than you should.

" I long for the summer, the fields are so green, and everything so pleasant at that time of the year; I always do long for the summer, but I think never so much in my life as for this that is coming—though sometimes I wish that last summer had never come. Perhaps you wish so too—and that this summer would not come either.

" Hope you will excuse all faults, as I never learnt but one month.—Your obedient humble servant, A. P."

Despite this and even more piteous appeals after the birth of her child, William paid no attention to Agnes, but allied himself in a loveless marriage with a lady of title who was openly false to him. Agnes meanwhile sinks lower and lower, driven out of every respectable calling, till finally she reaches the depth of degradation. She becomes a " daughter of joy " in London—not merely an apparent one, like Mrs Inchbald's previous heroine in *I'll Tell You What*—and is in the end arrested as one of a gang of forgers and condemned to death.

The judge who condemns her is—one must pardon the all too obvious coincidence—none other than her betrayer, William. Let Mrs Inchbald herself recount the inevitable :—

" The verdict was Guilty.

" She heard it with composure.

" But when the Judge placed the fatal velvet on his head, retreating a step or two back, and lifting her hands, with a scream, she exclaimed—

" ' O, not from you ! '

" The piercing shriek which accompanied those words prevented their being heard.

" Serene and dignified, as if no such exclamation had been uttered, William delivered the fatal speech, ending with, ' dead, dead, dead.'

" She fainted as he closed the period, and was carried back to prison in a swoon, while he adjourned the court to go to dinner."

It was not until the publication of the broadsheet (which in those days took the place of the evening-paper crime-"sensation") containing "the last dying words, speech, and confession" of the unhappy Agnes, that Mr Justice Norwynne, as William was then called, recognised in the trembling delinquent whom he had just sentenced to death none other than the neglected victim of his passion. With it arrived something a good deal more personal in the shape of a letter handed to him as the last written by Agnes in her cell. It was a letter pleading that he would at least care for her boy, who was now sixteen years old, and had been his mother's only faithful companion.

> "I will say no more," the letter ended, "for fear this should not come safe to your hand, for the people treat me as if I were mad. So I will say no more, only this, that whether I live or die, I forgive everybody, and I hope everybody will forgive me, and I pray that God will take pity on my son if you refuse: but I hope you will not refuse."

In a sudden rush of remorse, William rejoiced as he laid down the petition that she had "asked a favour he could bestow." He instantly sent for the boy, but was met with the reply that he had died of grief over his mother's execution!

Meanwhile, the old Dean—who had become at last a Bishop—had died in a palatial residence, and was buried under every circumstance of pomp, without one spontaneous tear being shed. His fiddling brother, on the other hand, came back from Africa live and well, to find his son, the younger Henry, grown into an honourable, if humble, countryman, married to a curate's daughter as virtuous and simple-minded as himself. So, while his legal Lordship drags on a miserable but splendid existence, torn with regret, and without any comfort from his heartless and titled wife, the two Henrys, father and son, settle down to a happy life of rural labour and its reward. Mrs Inchbald gives us a little glimpse of a typical scene in their home, "after a supper of roots from their garden, poultry that Rebecca's [the younger Henry's wife] hand had reared, and a jug brewed by young Henry."

> "'My son,' said the elder Henry, 'where under heaven shall three persons be met together happy as we three are?

> It is the want of industry, or the want of reflection, which makes the poor dissatisfied. Labour gives a value to rest which the idle can never taste; and reflection gives to the mind a degree of content which the unthinking never can know.' . . . 'Certainly,' returned young Henry; 'and yet those in poverty, ungrateful as they are, murmur against that government from which they receive the blessing.' 'But this is the fault of education—of early prejudice,' said the elder Henry. 'Our children observe us pay respect, even reverence, to the wealthy, while we slight or despise the poor. The impression thus made on their minds in youth is indelible during the more advanced periods of life; and they continue to pine after riches, and lament under poverty. Nor is the seeming folly wholly destitute of reason; for human beings are not yet so deeply sunk in voluptuous gratification, or childish vanity, as to place delight in any attainment which has not for its end the love or admiration of their fellow-beings.' 'Let the poor, then,' cried the younger Henry, 'no more be their own persecutors—no longer pay homage to wealth—instantaneously the whole idolatrous worship will cease—the idol will be broken.'"

Such was the moral Mrs Inchbald drew from this sometimes too palpably artificial story of Nature and Art. Frankly, one cannot resist remembering that she herself had started life as a poor farmer's daughter, but had made every effort to get away from that environment; nor had she ever betrayed a disposition to return. Also, though consistently abstemious in her tastes, she had shown herself in many ways a most shrewd business woman, and still evinced an undoubted partiality for the favours of rank and wealth.

None the less, we have to remember that she lived at a time when the ideal of the "simple life," in its comparison with the pageantry and cares of greatness, was still in what one might call its poetic stage. It had not been analysed, any more than the ideal of "education," upon which Mrs Inchbald's views were equally self-contradictory. It had not been fully brought home to her world that the "simple life" capable of being lived amidst intellectual society by "distinguished minds" (as Mrs Inchbald herself calls those of the two Henrys) is an extremely expensive form of existence. She could not foresee

the numbers of comparatively wealthy people who are even now seeking in vain a country cottage in picturesque but convenient surroundings! She was, in short, not more than an interesting child of her age, touched with the glamour of new hopes, and convinced, without being converted, by new ideas.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST WOMAN CRITIC

The *British Theatre*—Death of Sister Debby—Some Fashionable Friends—At Lady Cork's—A Watch-Tower in the Strand—Life or Morality? —The Critical Point of View—A Bout with Colman—The Farces.

We have now come to what is practically the end of Mrs Inchbald's creative life. She was to write other plays—including *The Massacre*, already mentioned—but none approaching in importance *Such Things Are*, *I'll Tell You What*, or *Everyone Has His Fault*. She was, however, still destined to put before the world one work which has done more for her present fame than any other. Probably nine out of ten of those people to whom the name of Mrs Inchbald has a familiar ring are hardly aware that she was either an actress or dramatist or even novelist. It is as the editress and critic of the body of "legitimate" drama played in her time that Mrs Inchbald is nowadays universally remembered. Neither in fact nor in aim can she be described as a great editress or as a great critic—indeed, since she did not choose the dramas that appear in her collection, she could hardly be described as an editress at all. As critic she has many limitations, which may be suggested hereafter. But she remained herself. Mrs Inchbald's *British Theatre* and Mrs Inchbald's *Collection of Farces* are part of her personality, part of her life. There are other reasons, too, why we should not willingly let her share in them die.

But before we begin to say anything at all about her critical work as such, we must just take a further glimpse of her life and its conditions. These henceforward may be said to have changed in very little else but the place of her lodging. Just about the time when as playwright she was at the height of her fame with the arrival of Sheridan's much-sought-after and

seldom-granted patronage (for Sheridan was not above jealousy), family troubles began to accumulate. Her sister Debby, who had been always a source of anxiety to her, died under the most painful circumstances, and even in want.

Directly she heard of poor Debby's predicament, Elizabeth had hurried to support her, and did all she possibly could to relieve the bitterness of her misguided sister's last hours. She supplied Debby with every possible comfort, brought her a priest, and took upon herself the whole of the funeral expenses. Debby's miserable fate pressed long and heavily upon Elizabeth's mind. She reproached herself with cruelty for having, as we have seen, driven a possible penitent from her door. One cannot help feeling that with the story of Agnes Primrose, written as it is with such palpable sincerity, Debby was not altogether unconcerned.

Then her brother George, who had proved as poor a farmer as he was an actor, and had been in frequent need of Elizabeth's never-grudged assistance, met with an almost equally painful fate in a duel at Hamburg. He was lodging there with a friend named Webber, and, in the course of a sudden quarrel, was shot dead. Yet another sister—Mrs Bigsby—was now in trouble owing to the blindness of her husband.

As against all these sorrows and anxieties, Mrs Inchbald, as ever, combined her life of toil and self-denial at home with never-failing social activity. From now onwards she was to be found not so much in the Bohemian world of the theatre. She began to move more among artists and literary folk, who were just then beginning to be released from the shackles of direct patronage, and to sun themselves in their own fame. At the same time she cannot be said to have neglected any opportunity of cultivating the favours of the nobility. Through Sir Charles Bunbury she got within bow-shot, as one might say, of the Prince Regent himself. She was taken to Carlton House with a party of thirty, and there is a delightful little letter of hers which is preserved, written just before she went to a masquerade in Arlington Street "to meet the Prince Regent."

"Have you an old *blue* handkerchief," she writes to an unknown friend, "or an old *blue* sash, or anything of a light faded *blue*, you can lend me to decorate my faded person for

> Mrs Morton Pitt's masquerade to-morrow evening? My domino is lent me. As I love uniformity in my expenses, as well as in my dress, I mean on this occasion to be at no expense at all. Observe—anything *blue*: a *blue* work bag, a *blue* pincushion, or a pair of *blue* garters I can fasten about me somewhere?"

Boaden suggests that she was going as a "blue-stocking"; but if she was, she seems to have omitted the one essential!

We hear of her staying with the Marquis of Abercorn at Stanmore, where, indeed, she managed to write some of *Nature and Art*. Here she met Lord and Lady George Seymour, and Copley and Hugh Douglas Hamilton the artists, and Dr Howley, then a young and rising divine. He was afterwards to become Archbishop of Canterbury, and to figure in that midnight interview at Kensington Palace where the little Princess Victoria was told that she was Queen, and promised that she "*would* be good." The gatherings at Stanmore seem to have been delightfully informal. We read that after dinner they varied talk upon religion and politics with such innocent amusements as a game of "crambo." Another aristocratic friend—or, at any rate, admirer—was Lord Milltown, who is said to have complimented her not only upon her beauty, but upon her youth! But he was more or less a theatrical hanger-on, and frequenter of the Covent Garden green-room, and does not count for much.

If she can be said to have had a patron at all, her most valuable friend in that respect was undoubtedly the famous eccentric Lady Cork and Orrery, who, as Mary Monckton, had been Dr Johnson's enchantress, and was to live on into the Victorian era, to become the "Mrs Leo Hunter" of Pickwick, and an early friend of Disraeli's. At Lady Cork's crowded salon Mrs Inchbald was always a favoured guest. She had been taken there by Lady Milner one Sunday, and Lady Cork asked her to dinner later on especially to meet Lady Charlotte Rawdon, who was particularly anxious to know the authoress of *A Simple Story*. At Lady Cork's and elsewhere, a kind of sister divinity, with whom Mrs Inchbald was always on the happiest of terms, was her fellow county-woman, Mrs Opie, the wife of the artist. Margaret Alderson, to call her by her maiden name, was born at Lowestoft, and had been, before she came to London, the pride of Norwich society. In almost every respect except

religion—and even in that, from one point of view—there was a curious likeness between our Elizabeth and Mrs Opie. Both were Suffolk women, both beautiful in age as well as youth, both novelists, both of gay social temperaments and full of fun, but both of blameless virtue.

Each of them, also, was approached by Godwin as well as Holcroft with a view to marriage. Mrs Opie differed from Mrs Inchbald in the fact that, although she refused Godwin, she had from the first a very high appreciation of Mary Wollstonecraft. It is impossible altogether to absolve our own heroine from a certain amount of jealousy in regard to Mary Wollstonecraft. With Mrs Opie—or Miss Alderson as she was then—there was no suggestion of this whatever. Perhaps she did not care for Godwin quite so much as Elizabeth did. He must have been a difficult fellow. Anyhow, from the first she held the mother of the future Mrs Shelley as a pioneer of womanhood. Her famous confession that " everything she had ever seen disappointed her except Mary Wollstonecraft and the Cumberland Lakes " is a testimony that will live longer than many a more elaborate tribute.

It is pleasant to remember that Mrs Opie and Mrs Inchbald remained to the end in the most intimate and friendly relation, although Mrs Opie became a Quakeress, and Mrs Inchbald, whatever doubts and struggles she may have had in her faith from the broader point of view, was never attracted to any other denomination than the Roman Catholicism to which she was born. To anyone, however, who reads the lives of the two women, the upshot, so far as their temperaments are concerned, is much the same. Both of them found, as the years went by, that the perilous No-Man's Land in which they lived—the little space that had been cleared for art amidst the noxious vapours of Regency vulgarity—left them very much in need of some moral mainstay. The fact that both of them were of a sympathetic temperament, susceptible not only to the gaieties around them, but also to the weakening sentimentalism that had been so largely imported at the time both from France and Germany, may have inclined each to the support of a strongly defined creed, singularly opposite though their choices were.

It was at Mrs Opie's that Elizabeth met a third famous literary woman of the day—the once widely popular Presby-

terian poetess and essayist, Mrs Barbauld, who included Elizabeth's novels in a collection she edited, and remained always a friend, though not a particularly intimate one. Possibly Mrs Barbauld's addiction to those "Evenings at Home," in the enlightenment of which she was so invaluable to her brother, the excellent John Aikin, may not have thrilled absolutely in accord with a habit of mind like that of Mrs Inchbald. Apart from her little workshop and bedroom, Elizabeth can, after all, hardly be said ever to have had a home since she ran away from Suffolk! At Kemble's, of course, Mrs Inchbald met any number of great folk, including in particular Lord and Lady Mount-Edgcombe. Many times she dined at Sheridan's, where she met the Marquis of Lorne and Sir Francis Burdett. She especially records having sat next to Sheridan at one of Perry's suppers of "all the talents." The Duchess of Devonshire appointed to be introduced to her at the theatre, but was prevented from coming, Lady Elizabeth Foster making her friend's apologies to "The Muse." At the Marquis of Abercorn's she met the Castlereaghs, walked in Lord Spencer's delightful park at Wimbledon, and made friends with Lady Mount-Cashel. Wherever she went, even though she was already nearing fifty, her beauty, her wit, her good taste and sparkling manner called forth universal admiration.

In contrast to all this splendour it is well just to take a little glimpse at the state of affairs in the little lodging at Leicester Square. Here the favourite alike of the social and intellectual world struggled along upon a self-restricted minimum of personal expenditure which—about this time, at any rate—was never allowed to be much more than thirty shillings a week.

> "I have been very ill indeed," she writes, "and looked even worse than I was; but since the weather has permitted me to leave off making my fire, scouring the grate, sifting the cinders, and all the *etcetera* of going up and down three pair of long stairs with water or dirt, I feel quite another creature; and it is my intention never again to hazard the greatest blessing God in his mercy can bestow, *health*, for any other enjoyment. Still I will not allow but that I am both able and willing to perform hard bodily labour: but then the fatigue of being a fine lady the remaining part of the day is too much for any common strength. Last Thursday morning I

finished scouring my bed-chamber, while a coach with a coronet and two footmen waited at the door to take me an airing."

Despite all these labours and hardships, she stayed on at Leicester Square until the third year of the new century. She was fond of the old place with its " summer green and lovely quiet." She had spent many laborious but at any rate some happy days there, and had grown to love almost everything about the place—not least her landlady's little son, whom she called " Pretty," but whose real name was George. She had even tolerated old General Martin, her fellow-lodger, who was at once the meanest of men and one of the most notorious old reprobates about town. He was accredited with having ruined more innocent young women than any other of the countless rakes of that abominable time, and in particular with having introduced the celebrated Kitty Fisher to a life of depravity.

Rascally old sinner as he was, the General appears to have been courteous to our Elizabeth—probably she knew the way of the world too well to give him an opportunity of being anything else. " He had," so she put it, " every requisite to render my abode here comfortable." " Most of all," she added, " his extreme parsimony made every creature in this house look up to me (with all my economy) as the most munificent of human beings." Before she left Leicester Square the old General died, and Mrs Inchbald could not forbear, though for some reasons she mourned him sincerely, a touch of satire on the fact that white plumes and white gloves were carried to his funeral, as he " died a bachelor " !

Quitting Leicester Square, " probably," as she wrote (one fancies with a sigh), " for ever," she made a most interesting little experiment by becoming an inmate of Annandale House, as it was called, at Turnham Green. This seems to have been a kind of convent without vows, where married ladies without husbands or other inconveniences, and spinsters of mature years, lived together in amity. The tenants were all Roman Catholics, and each of the sisterhood had her separate bedroom, the meals being taken in common.

The adventure was for a time a delightful one—above all

to a lonely soul of so observant and humorous a mind and so essentially sociable a nature. Mrs Inchbald took the liveliest interest in her " co-mates in exile." If only she had written another novel, one may be quite sure Annandale House would have figured at large in it. There was a Miss Meade, whom Elizabeth shrewdly judges must have been a dependent, for she stayed on " under the most harsh and insulting treatment " ; and there were a Mrs and Miss Nicholson, the former of whom Mrs Inchbald discovered to be a daughter of an old Bury friend. There were also a Mrs O'Meara, a Mrs and Miss Bagg, a Miss Franco, a Miss Prendergast, a Mrs. Hopkins, a Mrs Sartorius, a Miss Flower, and a Mrs Pilkington, who " was a visitor."

Amongst these worthy ladies, who surrounded a " genteel and regular board " untainted by even the presence of a male, Mrs Inchbald for a time lived a life of what was to her heavenly leisure from household drudgery.

> " I sit down every day," she writes, " to a far better table than ever I enjoyed for a constancy at any period in my life. Everything is clean in perfection—even my hands, which, Heaven knows, they have not been before for many a day. I don't know whether this does not constitute one of my first comforts. As to my associates, they are all obliging and respectable, and those who know but little, have the kindness to say but little " . . . " yet do not think I have forgot my affection for London. No, for it is frequently a great consolation to me to plan that, ' if Buonaparte should come and conquer,' I may then, without reproach, stand with a barrow of oranges and lemons in Leicester Square, and once more have the joy to call that place my *home*."

As might have been expected, the joys of this exemplary society did not exercise for very long their hold upon Elizabeth. Before many months were over she had returned to a lodging in London, where all the discomforts of loneliness and housework were balanced by the fact that she was her own mistress, and could come in and go out, and have her meals, modest as they were, when she pleased. The trouble was that Mrs Wyatt, the shepherdess of the Annandale flock, was a rather vulgar and dictatorial lady—not at all the sort of person to get on well with one to whom good breeding came by nature. So, after a

month or two, we read a characteristic entry in Elizabeth's diary : " Left Annandale House for *ever*. Came to London to lodge with Miss Baillie, a milliner in the Strand."

This time her London nest was lowly in every metaphorical sense, but certainly not in the real one, for it was right at the top of the house—at No. 163, " opposite the new church,"—with windows overlooking the river. One cannot suggest either its drawbacks or compensating joys better than in Mrs Inchbald's own words :—

> " My present apartment is so small, that I am all over black and blue with thumping my body and limbs against my furniture on every side : but then I have not far to *walk* to reach any thing I want ; for I can kindle my fire as I lie in bed ; and put on my cap as I dine, for the looking-glass is obliged to stand on the same table with my dinner. To be sure, if there was a fire in the night, I must inevitably be burnt, for I am at the top of the house, and so removed from the front part of it, that I cannot hear the least sound of anything from the street : but then, I have a great deal of fresh air ; more day-light than most people in London, and the enchanting view of the Thames ; the Surrey Hills ; and of three windmills, often throwing their giant arms about, secure from every attack of the Knight of the Woful Countenance."

Here, as may be gathered from a little reference in one of the letters just quoted, she lived through the anxious time for the whole nation when Napoleon was waiting at Boulogne to pounce upon perfidious Albion. It was from the window of a front-room lodger on the floor below that she saw the funeral cortège of Nelson pass on its way to St Paul's. Like many other English folk of her day, Elizabeth made no secret of a passionate admiration for " Boney." Her admiration, however, was more spectacular and romantic than based upon a very profound knowledge or perception of events.

It was in this Strand watch-tower that she began her new career as critic and as editress. In those days, as in these, a successful dramatist was something of a catch both to publishers and to magazine editors, and Mrs Inchbald, whose pen was every ready and fluent, soon found herself besieged with flattering offers. Already there had been rival bidders for

her memoirs—Phillips of St Paul's Churchyard had offered to pay a thousand pounds down before even seeing the manuscript; and her first publisher and friend, Robinson, was also in treaty for them. Prince Hoare enrolled her among the contributors to his magazine, *The Artist*. She wrote several articles for the *Edinburgh Review*. Also, before the foundation of the *Quarterly*, she was asked by John Murray himself, as well as by Hoppner, to " take an excursive view " of the present state of theatrical literature on the excuse of the already-deceased Mr Tobin's just-published play, *The School for Authors*. Tobin was, it may be remembered, author of *The Honey Moon*, a play to which she as a critic was kind, though it contains the most celebrated of all examples of bathos in the lines :

> " The man who lays his hand upon a woman,
> Save in the way of kindness, is a wretch,
> Whom 'twere gross flattery to name a coward ! "

Perhaps it is to Elizabeth's credit that she seems to have resisted this temptation—a temptation Macaulay would probably have welcomed—to shoot her satire on things in general from behind the corpse of a dramatist who had already been consigned to an untimely grave. But, from the critical point of view, her fame will rest upon the task, set her by Longman, of editing—or, at any rate, writing prefaces to—his still famous edition of the *British Theatre*.

In case of any disappointment on the part of those who wade through the twenty-five volumes, it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the plays were not chosen by her, and that, in many cases, one has only to turn to the prefaces to find out that, had she had her own way, this or that " lamentable tragedy " would certainly not have found a place among the candidates for classic honours. One cannot acquit her so readily in regard to the atrocious garblings of Shakespeare by Dryden, Garrick, Tate, and Cibber, which were included, and which her prefaces show that she tolerated. But, after all, there is no need to prove that she was a great critic, or vastly ahead of her time. These perversions were accepted by others without a murmur, and even we ourselves have not yet reached a stage at which true fidelity to Shakespeare's own vision and intent has pervaded the popular mind.

FANNY KEMBLE

The last work of Sir Thomas Lawrence

What we can do with justice is to see in these prefaces something of the character of Mrs Inchbald herself, and something of the very different point of view from our own that her age took of the functions of criticism. We may also see something of the very true knowledge of the stage that she showed, and something incidentally of her championship of her own sex. This last is not the least admirable quality of a work which was not self-sought, and which she did not engage in with her whole heart.

The main difference between Mrs Inchbald's criticisms and those which a modern critic would write throws a flood of light on to the attitude not only of the critic but of the whole audience. It accounts, too, in some degree for what seems the intolerable slackness and long-windedness of plays which excited a most lively admiration at the old patent theatres. This difference is that Mrs Inchbald—and indeed nearly all critics of that time—hardly worried at all about truth to life. Mrs Inchbald, as playwright, had already begun to realise that the criterion of life itself was the one by which plays would some day or other be judged. But, as critic, she never seems to have formulated this faith.

A good play, with her, was not a play which was true in every character and gripped the audience by what is now called " sincerity." It was far more important that the moral should be " just "—that it should coincide with a certain scheme of desirability which no one of that period ever dreamed of living up to—and that the manners, at any rate of all except the confessed " low-comedy " scenes, should be " elegant." If these credentials were fulfilled, the play was a good one. If by any chance there should be introduced any single character that could be described as " new to the stage," this was an occasion for something very like genuine excitement. What mattered after that were the opportunities for distinction that the play had given to one or other of the hundred or so fairly well-known players who had trodden the boards of the patent theatres since the revival of the theatre in London after the Restoration. The various demands that modernity makes, before the credit for a really great work of dramatic art is conferred, never seem to have crossed her mind.

As we know, a modern play must get right home to the busi-

nesses and bosoms of an audience, who are not supposed to know, or care, anything about the theatre. They have to be held spell-bound every moment. At the first sign of anything in the way of a conventional trick of the stage, the play falls immediately from grace. So far from looking upon the arrival of one character " new to the stage " as a surprise, every character has theoretically to be new to the stage, or we are inclined to groan. All the while Mrs Inchbald was searching for qualities quite different from these. She was, as a critic, walled up on every hand by Covent Garden and Drury Lane tradition. The great world outside, which supplies us with all the theme and three-quarters of the technique, went for nothing.

This did not by any means always make Mrs Inchbald more lenient. Sometimes it made her much more nicely—now and then almost ludicrously—critical. As an instance of this, one could hardly find a better example than her criticism of a play that has its faults, but which no one would nowadays pretend to judge upon the score of high morality, namely, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Mrs Inchbald has a strong objection to Falstaff.

> " Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth," she writes, " had more respect for Falstaff than for the tender passion, or she certainly would not have wished it disgraced by such a votary. But possibly there may have been morality in her desire, for volumes written against the fatal delusions of love could never be so effectual a cure for sighing youth or pining damsel as to behold their own disorder raging in the bosom of one so little formed to excite a sympathetic sensation."

Again, upon the score of " decorum in love," she objects to Morton's racy rural comedy, *Speed the Plough*, which introduced Mrs Grundy to the world. In this play the heroine falls in love with the squire's son disguised as a ploughman. That she should do this offended Mrs Inchbald to the quick. She could only understand it on the assumption that " some preternatural agent whispered to her that he was a man of birth." In any case she preferred to impute the cause of this sudden passion to some " magical information " conveyed

either by " the palpitation of her heart, or the quickness of her eye," rather than to the " want of female refinement."

This ever-lingering obsession of elegance makes even the dramatist who had herself defied the charge of " lowness " in *Such Things Are* and *I'll Tell You What*, damn with very faint praise the simplicities of that excellent, if ponderous, homily in homespun, *George Barnwell*, the story of the once-hopeful apprentice who became a thief and murderer through the allurements of a light-o'-love. It had been popular, she confesses, but

> " revived notions of elegance in calamity have, in late times, reduced the play to a mere holiday performance. . . . In spite of so coarse a moral for refined delinquents, *George Barnwell* is an evening's entertainment worthy of the most judicious admirer of the drama *when C. Kemble performs the character*."

Even in defence of her own plays, it is curious how intensely anxious she is as to whether the conclusion agrees with an abstract justice of which, as one can see by her own writings, the fallacy was only creeping into the public mind. With us it is to be doubted if the niceties of moral satisfaction over the end of a play matter in the slightest degree. Our controversies over a " happy ending " are not upon the question as to whether it is right from the moral point of view or not, but as to whether it is wiser to send an audience out in a doleful or in a cheery frame of mind. We have come to realise—at any rate since the time of Ibsen—that the action of no play can be said to begin on the rise of the curtain, nor end at its fall, and that the most jubilant marriage-bells may be a prelude to long years of undramatised misery.

Quite apart from this, one doubts if the mere assortment of prosperity among the characters has the faintest effect upon whether our critics or our playgoers will look upon the drama as good, bad, or indifferent. Generally, success or failure has been decided long before the finish. But Mrs Inchbald had not reached this point, or come anywhere near it. Justice in her day was demanded during the traffic of the stage. All the brilliance in the world would not atone for its absence. This was a demand which may have been partly responsible for those interminable last scenes in which everybody had to come

forward and explain what he or she was going to do for the remainder of his or her life, and in which every character had to be paired off to one of the opposite sex, from heavy father to boy in buttons.

An excellent instance of Mrs Inchbald's conscientiousness in these matters is the defence of her adaptation from the German of Kotzebue, called *Lovers' Vows*. It is a heavy, artificial melodrama—not the more lively, doubtless, through the fact that Mrs Inchbald confesses to have toned down the " forward and unequivocal manner " in which the original heroine had announced her affection for her lover. This she considered would have been " revolting to an English audience."

The main theme of the play is the restoration to a bold, bad German baron of the lady, Agatha by name, whom he had wronged in the long ago. She had been wandering about the country with her son, who, when the Baron refuses succour, unknowingly threatens his own father with his sword, and is imprisoned for it. The baron, it should be said, has a daughter, who very promptly falls in love with her father's gallant young assailant, an affair which is naturally put an end to by the relationship discovered at curtain-fall. The future of the young people does not seem to distress Mrs Inchbald. What she has to defend is the moral conveyed in the final reconciliation of the baron with the now matronly Agatha, his former victim. The critics had, she tells us, objected to the catastrophe on the plea that the wicked must be punished.

> " They forget," she says, " there is a punishment called *conscience*, which, though it seldom troubles the defamer's peace, may weigh heavy on the fallen female and her libertine seducer. But as a probationary prelude to the supposed happiness of the frail personages of this drama, the author has plunged the offender, Agatha, in bitterest poverty and woe ; which she receives as a contrite penitent, atoning for her sins. The baron, living in power and splendour, is still more rigorously visited by remorse ; and, in the reproaches uttered by his outcast son (become, by the father's criminal disregard of his necessities, a culprit, subject to death by the law), has exemplary chastisement. But yet, after all the varied anguish of his mind, should tranquillity promise, at length, to crown his future days, where is the

immorality? If holy books teach that the wicked too often prosper, why are plays to be withheld from inculcating the self-same doctrine? Not that a worldly man would class it amongst the prosperous events of life, to be (like the baron) compelled to marry his cast-off mistress, after twenty years' absence."

It is difficult to read this "message" without seeing that the question of the punishment of the guilty rather than the happiness of the innocent was uppermost in the eighteenth-century mind. If a modern audience could be got to sit through the play at all, it would certainly not be the old people it would worry about, whether from the point of view of punishment or no, and, less than either, the poor old lady who had in the days of her unthinking youth failed to take "the gipsy's warning." At the same time, Mrs Inchbald betrays an interesting but as yet only timid and apologetic consciousness of that now-important element of drama, unknown to so many of her contemporaries, called truth.

So ingenious is Mrs Inchbald in drawing a moral from plays which, to an unsophisticated sense, might certainly appear to betray none, that she manages to find food for characteristic moralisation even out of that horrid play of Nicholas Rowe's, *The Fair Penitent*, which gave an immortal phrase to the world, if by no means an immortal character, in the "gay Lothario." Here, too, she harks back upon her old theme of education in a way that sheds more light than we have had before upon the kind of education that she really pleaded for in *A Simple Story*.

"It is not requisite here to ascertain what kind of education the ladies of Italy received, at the time Rowe placed these scenes on the 'Ligurian shore';—but certain it is, that, since the ladies of Great Britain have learnt to spell, and have made other short steps in the path of literature, the once highly favoured Lothario of illiterate times has sunk in estimation. There is scarcely a woman of this country who can sympathise in the grief of the fair penitent, whose degraded taste could prefer, to an honourable and valiant youth, his 'skipping, dancing, worthless' rival. Whatever reasons may be urged against the more elevated instruction of the sex at present, than in former days, one good consequence at least accrues from it—they are better qualified

than heretofore to choose their lovers and husbands. It was in the age of female ignorance that the Lotharios, and the viler Lovelaces flourished. . . . Now, enlightened by a degree of masculine study, women's taste and judgement being improved—this best consequence of all ensues, men must improve to win them."

Just now and again there is a play in regard to which Mrs Inchbald refuses to snatch even at the quibble of a moral, and stands out boldly as a denunciatress. Such a play is Vanbrugh's *Provoked Wife*, which those of us who have read—and still more those of us who have seen it on the stage—know to be simply and inexcusably disgusting. Mrs Inchbald has to include it—she had not the power to keep it out,—but she does her best to speak her mind, and a very brave best it was under the circumstances. Even " with its worst pages curtailed, too much that is bad still lingers behind," she says. " To praise the wit of this drama is to recommend its most pernicious part." She recalls that even those " admirers of Garrick who spoke with delight of his excellence as an actor in Sir John Brute, could not feel much respect for him afterwards as a friend."

" Presbyterians, and other rigid sectaries," she continues, " preached and wrote much against the evil tendency of dramatic amusements, at the time this drama was in fashion. They did right. When plays such as *The Provoked Wife* are exhibited—it is charity to revile theatres."

On the other hand, in one extremely interesting criticism she compares her own anxiety over the moral teaching even of the most objectionable plays with the actual state of affairs in the society around her, much of which was every bit as depraved as that of the Restoration. This criticism occurs in the preface to a play not otherwise very worthy of celebrity—namely, *The Deserted Daughter* of her old friend Thomas Holcroft.

" There is a circumstance in this drama respecting the fear lest Lady Anne should know that her husband was ever married previous to his marriage with her, and some suspicions concerning his child, which seem to depend on certain points of extreme delicacy ; such as are of the utmost importance to all authors of plays as well as novels.

" But when, by degrees, the fashionable world shall have

become so philosophic in love, and concerning all the rights of wedlock, that scarce any event in gallantry shall create embarrassment on the score of refined sentiments, the resource of an author in his profession will be then nearly destroyed. For scrupulous purity of character, and refinement in sensations, are the delightful origin of all those passions, those powerful impulses of the mind, on which the works of imagination are chiefly founded.

"As *The Deserted Daughter* has not been written many years, the readers of fashion will possibly be surprised that the wife of Mordant should feel the slightest concern on account of her husband's former or present excesses, in the character of a libertine lover."

One cannot read this without feeling that it expresses something much more than Mrs Inchbald's cold conclusions upon Holcroft's work. One seems to hear speaking the very heart of an artist striving to find a soul of beauty in the corrupt and vulgar world of the Regency before it was purged by the fire of new and purer ideals.

Concerning her Shakespearean criticism, as has been already hinted, one can speak in very little else but terms of apology. Mrs Inchbald simply did not understand Shakespeare. His bold and free humanity, and his reckless fancy, were alike too wholly at variance with the traditions of her time. To be sure, she idealised whatever of his genius could and did come through to her. His pompously noble characters—particularly those of them, like Coriolanus and his good mother Volumnia, which come nearest of any of his creations to boring us—were regarded by her with reverential awe. He was still "The Bard." His heroines were either tragedy queens or *ingénues*, and were similarly respected. Almost anything that verged from these ideals she seemed to lament.

But we have all the time to remember that, however much she may have read, she never had an opportunity of seeing Shakespeare properly acted for his own sake upon the stage. She applauded the Dryden and Garrick perversions because these were the only revivals she had seen. They had held the stage right up to her day. They were accepted by everybody as the right thing, and Mrs Inchbald, though here and there one traces an insight that would have been ready for something

better, had not the courage—possibly not the imagination—for the entirely new and solely Shakespearean point of view which is only just arriving even with us. She saw Shakespeare still through the eyes of others—through the proscenium of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. The images of Kemble and Siddons in big and palmy parts were always between her and Shakespeare's own meaning and purpose.

There is hardly a play in which she comes more hopelessly to grief than in *The Tempest*. Here she not only tolerates Dryden's travesty, with its introduced alternative lovers, Hippolyto and Dorinda, but she glories in them.

> "It would never," she says, "have become a favourite on the stage, without the aid of Dryden's alteration. The human beings in the original drama had not business enough on the scene, to make human beings anxious about them: and the preternatural characters were more wonderful than pleasing; for whilst an auditor or a reader pours forth his praise before the creator of Caliban, he loathes the creature. Ariel, opposed to this monster, is one of those happy contrasts, which Shakespeare deals in; yet, this airy and mild spirit cannot charm an audience, except by singing. Nor could the love-scenes produce much sympathy, but from the artlessness of the objects concerned. Ignorance of what their own sensations mean, is the charm which alone elevates those pleasing characters above the common order of insipid lovers."

One curious phrase she has. She tells us that "there is sublimity in the pinches, cramps, and aches of Caliban." What this means it is difficult to divine, except that as "sublimity" was one of the catchwords of her age, just as "sincerity" is of ours, she had to try to drag it in somewhere!

Of *King Lear* she publishes, of course, Tate's happy-ending version, with just a suggestion at the finish that she agrees with Steevens in thinking it wrong. Desdemona is delightfully described as "a young and elegant female over whom every auditor feels himself agitated with interest." Hamlet, although she had acted him, she omits to criticise, giving instead an outline of Shakespeare's life, very jejune in view of our recent more intimate discoveries. Quite unconscious, as one feels

sure she was, of anything like the superior attitude, one cannot forbear a smile over her final phrase of commendation.

> " Various reasons," she tells us, " are assigned, and good ones, why little more is known of this revered poet. . . . Happily, the most material fact concerning him has never admitted of an argument—the high merit of his compositions."

Over *Romeo and Juliet*—of which she gives us Garrick's hotch-potch—she is more discursive, though there is a curious lack of enthusiasm and sense of apology.

> " Otway," she says, " would have rendered it more affecting. . . . The reason that an auditor or reader cannot feel a powerful sympathy in the sorrows of these fervent lovers, is because they have witnessed the growth of their passion from its birth to its maturity, and do not honour it with that worth of sentiment, as if they had conceived it to have been of longer duration, fixed by time, and rendered more tender by familiarity. The ardour of the youthful pairs, like the fervency of children, affords high amusement without much anxiety that their wishes should be accomplished."

This is a little surprising as coming from a lady who, when she was considerably older than Juliet, had conceived that wild passion for Griffith, whom she had hardly even seen, but " every letter " of whose name " was harmony," and one who in her quite mature womanhood had run out of the back door to escape the embarrassment of facing an endeared but harmless medical man. At the same time there is something in what she says. There is a wild pity in the very youth of Romeo and of Juliet which is seldom conveyed in our usually grown-up method of portrayal, and was probably as rarely seen in Mrs Inchbald's day.

When, however, it comes to the tradition of gay, bustling comedies which did survive amidst the banal sentiments and glamorous terrors of which we have been hearing, Mrs Inchbald knew her ground and is well worth reading, not only for her appreciations, but for her reminiscences of the members of that supremely able school of comedy actors in this kind to which she had herself belonged. There also remains the

splendid way in which, without a trace of jealousy, she praises the plays written by other women dramatists.

It is well to remember that in her age anything like the natural acceptance of a woman playwright was a comparatively new thing. A single lifetime—for it was only eighty years—could have stretched from the death of Aphra Behn, " the George Sand of the Restoration " and the undoubted pioneer in England of the playwriting sisterhood, and the birth of Mrs Inchbald. The interval is almost exactly filled up by two other women playwrights. Both of them could now boast the distinction of having produced classics that have lived to our own time. They were Mrs Centlivre, authoress of *The Busybody*, adapted from Molière's *L'Étourdi*, and of that admirable acting-comedy, *The Wonder : A Woman Keeps a Secret*; and Mrs Cowley, authoress of *The Belle's Stratagem*, in the first production of which Mrs Inchbald herself played a part at Covent Garden only a few months after her coming to town.

So far as Aphra Behn is concerned Mrs Inchbald could not do anything in particular, for the simple reason that her plays, brisk and witty as they undoubtedly are, were too unspeakably filthy even for the not very fastidious taste of Mrs Inchbald's own time. Mrs Behn certainly deserves a good deal more credit than is often allowed her. Her morals may have been no better than those of her male contemporaries, but they were at least no worse. Her plays were exceedingly popular. She is honoured in the fact that she lived by her pen, rather than by means all too obviously favoured in the case of so many other ladies of the Restoration stage. To this end it was only natural she should be tempted to follow the popular taste.

Apart from their nastiness, her plays are as clever as could be. Even in her most objectionable scenes, which inspired contemporary satire to charge her with having " fairly put all characters to bed," she may be said to have only anticipated the " bedroom farce," which has been in considerable vogue within our own experience. When, in *The Rover*, she at once scandalised and delighted the Restoration audience by exhibiting her hero in his pants, she did little more than herald Mr Cyril Maude's appearance in pyjamas, in his highly successful character of Toddles. At the same time, Mrs Behn is to be

remembered as a novelist and as the original creator of the story of *Oroonoko*, which Sotherne dramatised into one of the most famous noble-savage dramas of the age. So for all her sins, and all her failings of taste, we can afford to say a good word for Aphra Behn. In any event, the worst that she wrote was not nearly so vile as the things that were written about her by so-called gentlemen and men of honour.

With Mrs Centlivre the case is different. Although she, too, is credited with some gay adventures, she had the advantage of being married to Queen Anne's cook. Her plays, though by no means all of them above reproach from the moral point of view, are in the main presentable. Upon her, Mrs Inchbald launches forth into fearless encomiums. There is no question that several of Mrs Centlivre's plays are models of brisk comedy. She cared very little about absolute originality in her plots ; but there is a happy idea behind each. *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, with its skit upon Quakers, has enriched our language with the name (though his character is largely forgotten) of " the real Simon Pure." Garrick's choice of the part of Don Felix in *The Wonder*, as that in which he should bid his farewell to the stage, was by no means an unworthy honour to the " wrangling lovers " scene, in which, by the way, Mrs Inchbald herself had played as Violante in her early days.

Mrs Cowley, although *The Belle's Stratagem* has held the stage longer than anything of Mrs Centlivre's, had, perhaps, less genius than the other two. Possibly, too, she had not the same experience of the world with which to inform her dramatic work. *The Belle's Stratagem* was clever but, it has to be admitted, extremely lucky. Its great scene of Doricourt's pretended madness has its obvious precedent in Congreve's *Love for Love*, and her other plays are none of them quite on the classic plane. The wife of an East India captain, and married happily for some years before even the thought of playwriting occurred to her, she is said to have written her first play, *The Runaway*, just to prove her husband in the wrong when she had boasted she could write a comedy as good as one that they had been seeing together. It was written in a fortnight, sent to Garrick, accepted at once, and was very successful. But, apart from *The Belle's Stratagem*, success

was not always to be Mrs Cowley's lot. Her efforts at tragedy were anything but triumphs. One of them, *The Fate of Sparta*, called forth a famous epigram from Parsons, the actor :

> " Ingenious Cowley, while we viewed
> Of Sparta's sons the lot severe,
> We caught the Spartan fortitude,
> And saw their woes without a tear."

Mrs Cowley had found a kind of side-door to contemporary fame as having been the Anna Matilda of the Della Cruscans. As such she will live as the theme of satire rather than on her own strength. None the less, in spite of Mrs Cowley's limitations, and although, as a younger contemporary, Mrs Inchbald might have had some excuse for mentioning them, our critic only finds what is good in her.

One cannot help thinking that, over the plays of Centlivre and Cowley, Mrs Inchbald was very conscious that comedies of intrigue and of manners—in which both they and she excelled—were a form of theatrical art which women were, and are, admirably suited by their experience and opportunities to produce. We hear nothing, it is well to note, of the tragedies of Hannah More (who had so fierce a controversy with Mrs Cowley) or of Joanna Baillie. As Mrs Inchbald did not choose the plays included and criticised in her twenty-five volumes, one must not blame her ; but, from what one gathers, one feels that she would not have gone into hysterics over them. To judge by our present-day taste, she would have been right in refraining, though Joanna's work had merits of its own.

As to the candour of Mrs Inchbald's prefaces, when she really had an opinion of her own, it is worth remembering that she was honest enough to find some faults even in the efforts of gentlemen who were very much in a position to respond. The younger Colman, for instance, of the Haymarket dynasty, raised quite a storm of dust over her quite courteous but not sufficiently adulatory remarks upon his plays, *The Mountaineers* and *Inkle and Yarico*. He was also very angry at her suggestions as to the share Garrick and the elder Colman had had in their joint comedy, *The Clandestine Marriage*.

Both plays and controversy are as dead now as are the " Mountaineers " and Inkle and Yarico themselves, but the little

affair served to prove that Mrs Inchbald as a controversialist was behind no one in the faculty of biting satire. Colman, knowing the scantiness of Mrs Inchbald's educational advantages, had compared her with the learned Madame Dacier, the translator of the *Iliad*. Mrs Inchbald slily replies to him in an open letter in front of his own excellent comedy, *The Heir-at-Law*, which is still celebrated for the comic pedant, Dr Pangloss. It is her allusion to this character that barbs the final shaft of irony in her letter, which ends as follows :

> " Permit me, notwithstanding this acquiescence in your contempt for my literary acquirements, to apprise you, that in comparing me, as a critic, with Madame Dacier, you have, inadvertently, placed yourself, as an author, in the rank with Homer. I might as well aspire to write remarks on *The Iliad*, as Dacier condescend to give comments on *The Mountaineers*. Be that as it may, I willingly subscribe myself an unlettered woman, and as willingly yield to you all those scholastic honours which you have so excellently described in the following play."

As " selector " of the *Collection of Farces*, in seven volumes but without prefaces, which was published some three years after her *British Theatre*, Mrs Inchbald holds a ground upon which modernity cannot challenge her, though so far as work is concerned she confessed to having " earned fifty pounds in five minutes." We of the passing generation have grown accustomed to elaborate and highly mechanised three-act farce, lasting a whole evening—a type which Sir Arthur Pinero brought to perfection. We have the so-called " farce of ideas," represented by *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Fanny's First Play*. But we have nothing that corresponds to the free-and-easy short farce of character—with or without songs—in which the eighteenth-century audiences revelled.

It has been driven from the stage by, among other things, the exigencies of time. In days when even a Haymarket programme began before seven and often went on till long after midnight, it was possible for the performance not only to start with a farce but to finish with another, a long play or more coming between. Gradually, thanks to fiercer competition and to the ever-growing need for focussing attention upon

a single venture, the scope of the short farce first dwindled to the one-act "curtain-raiser" (never so good a farcical opportunity as the finish of the evening) and then vanished altogether. The whole convention of light, short, unburdened farce has thus—apart from odd-and-end entertainments—completely gone. Whether it will return or not remains to be seen. Quite possibly the very architecture of our illusive stage, with its call for a naturalistic picture, helps to prevent this.

In Mrs Inchbald's time, however, farces of this kind were at their height both of efficiency and favour. The public enjoyed them (King George III. always demanded a farce); the best actors and actresses played in them; the best dramatists wrote them. Mrs Inchbald herself, as we have seen, made her first reputation by a trifling little affair that would hardly find a place in a present-day bill—outside revue. For these reasons, if for no others, it is worth while to turn over some of those old pages even now. One does not find great literature. One does not find what we should call careful dramatic joinery or playcraft. But one is at least reminded (in such farces, for instance, as *The Devil to Pay*, *Raising the Wind*, *No Song, No Supper*, and a host of others) of a bright, popular theatrical tradition, carried right down from the *Commedia dell' Arte*—a tradition that we have undoubtedly lost. There was a rough-and-tumble spirit, a romping, light-hearted gaiety and chance for humour in character about those old eighteenth-century farces that no anxiously constructed modern affair quite supplies. It was not a mere accident that Dickens in his youth devoured Mrs Inchbald's *Farces*, and confessed afterwards that he owed thereto quite a deal of his vivid humour and appetite for character.

CHAPTER VII

A CHARMING OLD LADY

Society and Solitude—Regent's Park—Yet More Admirers!—Charles Moore—A Tribute from Maria Edgeworth—Mrs Shelley's Character Sketch of Madame de Staël—Kensington House—Kemble's Last Visit—A Chart of Happiness—Her Death.

THERE were still twelve years of life for Mrs Inchbald after the publication of the *British Theatre* and of the *Collection of Farces*, both immense successes. This last fact did not, as it happened, either matter or appeal very much to their editress, who never prided herself very much upon them, as being confessedly only journeyman's work and a task full of annoyances. The twelve years to come were to be, from the social standpoint, by no means the least important in Elizabeth's varied career. She was now a celebrity, accepted everywhere, and receiving homage from all quarters, especially from the younger generation. From the point of view of her art, however, they were curiously fruitless. Beyond occasional articles for magazines and for reviews, and innumerable and delightful letters to her friends, her pen produced nothing more at all that is memorable, although it was said of her that "she had a fortune at the end of her fingers, if only she would move them."

She read continually everything she could get hold of, joined a circulating library—rather an event in those pre-Mudie days—and pleaded for books from all her friends. Now and again she undoubtedly busied herself upon those reminiscences for which the publishers were clamouring, and in which, it was supposed, she would figure as a kind of Mrs Asquith of her generation. These, however, were destined, to her abiding honour, never to see the light—although we have still some fragments that tell us sufficiently how fascinating a revelation they would have been. The truth is that, as the time went on,

the reasons for anything in the way of ambition gradually dwindled. One by one her sisters, to whose welfare she had been so passionately devoted, died off. Both Dolly and Anne Hunt and Mrs Bigsby had been practically dependent upon her. She gave Dolly and Anne annuities—a minimum of eighty pounds a year for Dolly, and fifty pounds for Anne—and paid for Mrs Bigsby's board. How scrupulously careful she was over these deeds of that truest charity which begins at home is shown in some extracts Boaden makes from her diary. They are entries which quite obviously the world was never intended to see. Here, for instance, is one regarding Dolly :—

> " Annuity, with the income tax, eighty-eight pounds. When my play came out, five pounds. When I went to the country, two pounds. When I drew on Longman, three pounds. Her broken finger, one pound. Heavy head, one pound. Total, one hundred pounds."

Anyone who imagines that these gifts were made easily from an overflowing store, can soon be disillusioned by Elizabeth's frank but uncomplaining confession in one of her letters as to how the help was spared. It tells how she slept on a sofa in her one sitting-room to save the wherewithal :—

> " I say NO to all the vanities of the world, and perhaps soon shall have to say that I allow my poor infirm sister a hundred a year. I have raised my allowance to eighty ; but, in the rapid stride of her wants, and my obligation as a Christian to make no selfish refusal to the poor, a few months, I foresee, must make the sum a hundred. I have not been in bed these five nights ; my bed-chamber due north, ' where the sun never shines,' has a chimney that will not draw up the smoke. This might be remedied by a bricklayer, and I might buy a curtain to the window, and carpet for the floor to keep me warm ; but I am resolved to be at no farther expense."

Only the detestable Robert Inchbald, the long-lamented Mr Inchbald's spurious issue, and the " boy " of their earlier wanderings, remained a trouble to her right to the finish, and was perpetually pestering her for money, seldom refused.

To all intents and purposes, while she was still in the fifties Mrs Inchbald retired from active work. When not demanded

by one or other of her hosts of friends, she lived the life of a strictly economical but never crabbed or unsociable recluse. As before, she moved from lodging to lodging, never quite satisfied. From the Strand she went to St George's Terrace, or St George's Row, as it was called at that time, close to the then newly-laid-out Regent's Park, lodging first in a house owned by her friend Este, of *The World*, and then elsewhere in the same row, above a taproom. These new quarters, although there were constant troubles from neighbours, had their advantages. There was no Thames and no windmills, but the landscape was quite tolerable.

> "The scene," she says in one of her letters, "is more beautiful than ever. The trees tipped with golden leaves, and the canal peeping through their branches, which are half stripped, with the grass of the extensive ground as green as in Spring, all delight my eye, and almost break my heart. I must have London, combined with the sun, the moon, and the stars, with land or with water, to fill my imagination, and excite my contemplation."

One great inducement there was that led her to forget the discomforts of St George's Row. This was its nearness to the Roman Catholic Chapel in Spanish Place. As the years went by, and she was left more and more alone in the world, Mrs Inchbald very much atoned for that neglect of her religious duties to which she had undoubtedly pleaded guilty in her feverish and bewildered youth. She regularly attended Mass and Confession, either at Spanish Place or at Farm Street, and consulted her confessor, Father Jaffey, upon many temporal as well as spiritual matters. At the same time she was anything but a morose anchorite. Alike in her letters, and wherever and whenever she allowed herself to be seen, she proved everything that is lively, racy, and exhilarating. She was still beautiful, and—though some people might think it astonishing in the case of a confirmed and something more than middle-aged widow, who had refused so many eligible suitors—she was still pursued by masculine admirers. Even when she was sixty-five, a sonnet was written in praise of her beauty ; but by this time she was, as Lord Orrery put it, "too proud to be vain." One of the last of her adorers was Charles Moore, the younger

brother of the hero of Corunna, who wrote quite a number of impassioned letters making offers of a thoroughly honourable and distinctly matrimonial nature. He has also left behind him a character sketch, or anticipative obituary, curiously perspicacious for a love-sick swain.

"A very lively and ingenious English authoress [so he describes Mrs Inchbald], whom Fortune maliciously placed in a situation, and threw into a profession, beneath her merits, though her genius were to be left out of account. Nature felt the affront, and was resolved to vindicate the claims of her favourite. She inspired that energy which looks on difficulty as the natural element of superior minds. She remembered that Shakespeare as a player was only the tame and unskilled representative of his own apparition: as an author he had soared to the sublime enthusiasm of Hamlet and Othello. Our fair authoress, thus instructed, but unsullied by her intercourse with the world, both in her dramatic and other pieces, has displayed a quick intelligence of the foibles of our nature—an horror at vice, yet pity for the vicious—and an assertion throughout of the native dignity of steady moral principles. Her conversation was easy and animated. Her curiosity was not such as is (blasphemously) imputed to her sex; yet she was inquisitive. Never did an antiquated matron trace a tale of scandal through all its meanders of authority, with more undeviating eagerness, than our heroine hunted out a new source of useful information. Her school was society; to which she gratefully returned, as an instructress, what she had gathered as a scholar. Her passion was the contemplation of superior excellence; and though her personal charms secured her admirers, which flattered her as a woman, she preferred the homage of the MIND, in her higher character of a woman of genius. A little disposition to coquetry perhaps she had, but the frankness of her nature disdained it; and when necessity called for the choice of the one or the other, sincerity was sure to triumph. She was born in the year 1753, and passed to a better life (as one of her contemporaries predicted) in the THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH YEAR OF HER AGE!"

Mrs Inchbald had, at the same time, a faculty of engendering intense and respectful affection among the most intelligent young people of her own sex. That brilliant and undoubtedly greater,

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

From the picture by John Opie in the National Portrait Gallery

but kindred genius, Maria Edgeworth, was among those who looked upon Mrs Inchbald as a pupil might upon a beloved master. Both Maria and that remarkable father of hers were constantly writing from Ireland their appreciation of Mrs Inchbald's books. As ever, Maria's letters were far and away the better. Maria pays tribute, in her first letter, to *A Simple Story*. This deserves particularly to be remembered as coming from one who was to prove not only a mistress but a pioneer in her art, and to carry to a splendid fulfilment that naturalism after which Mrs Inchbald herself was only half-consciously groping.

> " I hope you will not suspect me of the common author's practice of returning praise for praise, when I tell you that I have just been reading, for the third—I believe for the fourth time—the *Simple Story*. Its effect upon my feelings was as powerful as at the first reading ; I never read any novel—I except none—I never read any novel that affected me so strongly, or that so completely possessed me with the belief in the real existence of all the people it represents. I never once recollected the author whilst I was reading it ; never said or thought, ' that's a fine sentiment '—or ' that is well expressed '—or ' that is well invented.' I believed all to be real, and was affected as I should be by the real scenes if they had passed before my eyes."

Another young and bright spirit who had a special regard for Mrs Inchbald was Mary Godwin, who had already become Mrs Shelley before our Elizabeth had bidden the world good-bye. This regard existed in spite of the unconcealed antipathy that Mrs Inchbald had so frankly and, one cannot help thinking, wrongly expressed towards Mary Wollstonecraft, Mrs Shelley's mother. Towards the end of their lives Mrs Inchbald and Godwin had become reconciled in a half-and-half sort of way, so that the younger Mary had, at any rate, some chance of remembering Mrs Inchbald in her last years, and has left a very vivid picture of our heroine as she was at that time :—

> " She was exceedingly beautiful. The spirit of adventure natural in youth seems to have developed itself in her with unusual vigour, but it was joined by a certain saving grace of self-command and self-possession that bore her through nearly unharmed. . . . Apt to fall in love and desirous to

marry, she continued single because the men who loved and admired her were too worldly to take an actress and a poor author, however lovely and charming, for a wife. . . . I have heard that a rival beauty of her day pettishly complained that when Mrs Inchbald came into a room, and sat in a chair in the middle of it as was her wont, every man gathered round it, and it was vain for any other woman to attempt to gain attention. Godwin could not fail to admire her; she became and continued to be a favourite. Her talents, her beauty, her manners, were all delightful to him. He used to describe her as a piquant mixture between a lady and a milkmaid, and added that Sheridan declared she was the only authoress whose society pleased him."

Of Shelley himself we hear nothing from Mrs Inchbald, or from her biographers, but that she must have seen and known him cannot but be imagined. Their orbits may be said to have touched, without crossing. When one remembers that in this way Mrs Inchbald bridged the gulf between Garrick as representing the old world, and Shelley as the herald-angel of the new, one realises with a singular clearness the exact geography, if one might so call it, of her life-story.

One of the new acquaintances of her last years who specially interested Mrs Inchbald was Mme de Staël, with whose views upon Napoleon our Elizabeth would probably not have agreed, but for whom she had a very profound regard. It was at the express wish of the authoress of *Corinne* that Mrs Opie introduced the authoress of *A Simple Story*. Mrs Inchbald herself, in a letter to her friend, Mrs Phillips, gives a pleasant little account of their meeting.

"I admired Mde de Staël, much," she writes. "She talked to me the whole time: so did Miss Edgeworth whenever I met her in company. These authoresses suppose me dead, and seem to pay a tribute to my memory: but with Madame de Staël it seemed no passing compliment; she was inquisitive as well as attentive, and entreated me to explain to her the motive why I shunned society? 'Because,' I replied, 'I dread the loneliness that will follow.' 'What! You will feel your solitude more when you return from this company, than you did before you came hither?' 'Yes.' 'I should think it would elevate your spirits: why will you feel your loneliness more?' 'Because I have no one

to tell that I have seen You ; no one to describe your person to ; no one to whom I can repeat the many encomiums you have passed on my *Simple Story* ; no one to enjoy any of your praises but myself ! ' ' Ah, ah ! you have no children ' ; and she turned to an elegant young woman, her daughter, with pathetic tenderness.

" She then so forcibly depicted a mother's joys, that she sent me home more melancholy at the comparison of our situations in life, than could have arisen from the consequences of riches or poverty. I called by appointment at her house two days after. I was told she was Ill. The next morning my paper explained her illness. You have seen the death of her son in the papers : he was one of Bernadotte's aid-de-camps ; the most beautiful young man that ever was seen—only nineteen : a duel with sabres, and the first stroke literally cut off his head ! Necker's grandson ! "

The last refuge in life for Mrs Inchbald, and her resting-place in death, was to be, very appropriately, the Old Court suburb of Kensington. Some two years before she died she went to live at Kensington House, described as a " genteel establishment," chiefly for Roman Catholics, in the private chapel of which the Archbishop of Jerusalem and Abbé Mathias were wont to officiate. By this time all too many of her friends as well as relatives had died, and she had particularly to mourn the loss of Cosway, the painter, and his wife, who were her fellow-lodgers there—both " mystics." Here Kemble brought the great Talma to visit her, and it was here, not long before her death and his own, that Kemble saw her for the last time, on his departure for a tour of Italy. A little while after, he wrote one of the few natural and straightforward letters from him to her that survive :—

" When I left you before, dearest, it was to visit Spain, and you managed for me in my absence ; now I think I shall make out my tour to Italy, and end, perhaps, like an old Roman."

He did, as events turned out, " end like an old Roman," not much later than he had expected, and far away from the London he knew and loved so well, at Lausanne. There is something not a little touching about this one frank expression of endearment at the last on the part of the man for whom

Mrs Inchbald had sacrificed so many chances in the best years of her life. Even the most rigid propriety may pardon these two old people for just that little trace of sentiment. There is no possible doubt that what both of them felt to be a final farewell very much affected Elizabeth, though one might wish the chief regret to have been on his side. It would have served him right. True, it was to him that she owed her first encouragement as a novelist-to-be; but with the touch of natural genius that there was in Elizabeth, if Kemble had not prompted her, somebody else most probably would. It is certain that she was of enormous use to him. In those earliest days she probably inspired Kemble just as much as he inspired her. Even the difficult business, to which he refers, of the taking over of Covent Garden Theatre on his behalf while he was away (though, in point of fact, it proved a disastrous venture) was a characteristic good turn, and a significant reversal of the traditional attitude of a "woman scorned"!

It was at Kensington House, after a very short illness due to a chill, that Mrs Inchbald died on the 1st of August 1821—almost exactly a hundred years ago—in her sixty-ninth year. Her last act was, upon her confessor's advice, to burn the entire manuscript of those much-sought-after reminiscences, upon which she had laboured on and off for so many years. The wisdom of this decision, even from the hints that we have had, cannot be doubted. It is an example that might well be more widely followed by less worthy autobiographers. The fragments, however, that Boaden managed to rescue from her diaries and pocket-books make one wish, in spite of everything, that a few more could have been saved, just for the instruction of the judicious.

One of the most fascinating of these fragments is a sort of chart of happiness, in which Elizabeth goes through the whole of her life since her marriage—thirty-six years—jotting down the readings, as one might say, of her soul's barometer. This was headed by her, "An Account of my Septembers." As it happens, she was born in October and married in June. The "Septembers" were probably preferred on account of her first appearance on the stage as Cordelia. One may note that the first "very happy" year was that of the publication of *A Simple Story*, and that, contrary to the general experience,

the middle years, with all their freight of labour and responsibilities, were, on an average, the happiest.

HER SEPTEMBERS

(ENDORSED BY MRS INCHBALD)

An account of my Septembers, that did not belong to my yearly Ladies' Own Memorandum Pocket-book.

Born October 15, 1753. Married in 1772.

Septembers since I married :—

	Year.		
London, the Sea . .	1772.		
Aberdeen . . .	1773.	1 year.	Happy.
Jedburgh, Musselburgh .	1774.	2 years.	Middling
Glasgow, Dumfries .	1775.	3 ,,	Middling.
France, Brighton, Liverpool.	1776.	4 ,,	Unhappy.
Canterbury, my mother's, Hull.	1777.	5 ,,	Not happy.
Wakefield, Doncaster .	1778.	6 ,,	Not happy.
Do., a widow . .	1779.	7 ,,	Not unhappy.
London . . .	1780.	8 ,,	Neither.
London (come from my mother's).	1781.	9 ,,	Unhappy.
London (going to Dublin)	1782.	10 ,,	Mostly unhappy.
London (going to St Martin's Lane).	1783.	11 ,,	Unhappy.
London (going to Hart Street, after *The Mogul Tale*).	1784.	12 ,,	Happy.
London (after *I'll Tell You What* and before *Appearance is Against Them*).	1785.	13 ,,	Happy.
London (in Great Russell Street, after *The Widow's Vow*).	1786.	14 ,,	Happy.
London (after *Such Things Are* and *The Midnight Hour*).	1787.	15 ,,	Happy.

	Year.		
London (after *All on a Summer Day*, *Condemned*, and *Animal Magnetism*).	1788.	16 years.	Not unhappy.
London (after *Child of Nature* and *Married Man*).	1789.	17 ,,	Not happy.
London (after my long illness).	1790.	18 ,,	Not unhappy.
London (after my novel, *Simple Story*, and *Next-Door Neighbours*).	1791.	19 ,,	Very happy.
London (in Leicester Square, after *Young Men and Old Women*).	1792.	20 ,,	Cheerful, content and sometimes rather happy.
London (after *Everyone Has His Fault*).	1793.	21 ,,	Quite happy.
London (after receiving two hundred pounds for a farce, not yet performed).	1794.	22 ,,	Extremely happy but for poor Debby's death.
London (after *The Wedding Day*; my brother George's death, and an intimate acquaintance with Dr Gisborne).	1795.	23 ,,	Not happy.
London (after my novel, *Nature and Art*).	1796.	24 ,,	In prosperity, and at times very happy; at times not in perfect health, and sometimes very low-spirited.
London (after *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are*; after an alteration in my teeth and the death of Dr Warren).	1797.	25 ,,	Yet far from unhappy.

	Year.			
London (rehearsing *Lovers' Vows*).	1798	26 years.		Happy, but for suspicion amounting almost to certainty of a rapid appearance of age in my face.
London (after *Lovers' Vows*, after my brother and sister Bigsbys' deaths; and after having just sold a new German play, going into rehearsal).	1799.	27	,,	Extremely happy but for the still nearer approach of age.
London (after *The Wise Men of the East*).	1800.	28	,,	Still happy, but for my still increased appearance of declining years.
London (after the death of my best friend in the world, Mr Robinson, and in the suspicion of never more being as a young woman again).	1801.	29	,,	Very happy, but for my years.
London (after a disappointment from my translation of *The Egyptian Boy*; after hearing for certain that my nephew, George Simpson, was dead—his mother also—and after feeling wholly indifferent about Dr Gisborne).	1802.	30	,,	Very happy but for ill health, ill looks, etc.
Turnham Green (after quitting Leicester Square probably for ever — after caring scarce at all, or thinking of Dr Gisborne; entertaining some	1803.	31	,,	Very happy.

	Year.		
hopes on the publication of my *Life*, and some fears of an invasion bythe French).			
London (wholly retired when at home, and living in view of the Thames; just completed a new play received with marks of high approbation by the managers; often melancholy, yet often in spirits).	1804.	32 years.	Seldom either happy or unhappy.
Do. situation (after the moderate success of *To Marry or Not to Marry*; undetermined as to my future plans of residence).	1805.	33 ,,	Mostly unhappy.
Barton in Suffolk, and London (after writing and publication of my remarks which had given me most extreme labour and still greater uneasiness: after the death of Dr Gisborne too, and on my return to London).	1806.	34 ,,	Nearly happy.
London (after a certainty that my remarks were disliked).	1807.	35 ,,	Very unhappy.
London (after all my remarks completed, and my public reply to Colman the Younger's address to me; Dolly very ill, and I hesitating whether to go to Aldborough, to Margate, or where).	1808.	36 ,,	Extremely unhappy.

At her death Elizabeth was found to have, after all her outgoings, a little fortune of some five thousand pounds, most of which she left to her nephew George Huggins and her niece Ann Jarrett (daughter of Ann Hunt), with an undeserved twenty pounds a year to Robert Inchbald, and smaller bequests to the Covent Garden Theatrical Fund; to Mrs Mattocks, the actress; to Mrs Phillips (one of her executors, the other being George Huggins); to the Catholic Society for the Relief of the Aged Poor; to a god-daughter, "Elizabeth Cummins, of the Theatre Royal, York"; to her laundress, hairdresser, oculist, and others. She directed that "Mass and all other sacred ceremonies may be performed on my account, as are usual upon the decease of a Roman Catholic Christian,"—a behest which was, of course, duly fulfilled.

In a quiet corner of Kensington Churchyard, next to Canning's far more pretentious memorial to his son, and against the back wall of some dingy-looking houses, one may still see the plain grey stone that marks Mrs Inchbald's grave. It is inscribed :—

> "Sacred to the Memory of Elizabeth Inchbald, whose writings will be cherished while truth, simplicity, and feeling command public admiration; and whose retired and exemplary life closed, as it existed, in acts of charity and benevolence."

Admirable as this little epitaph is, it cannot, after all, give us the real Elizabeth Inchbald. It cannot bring back the sparkle of her eyes, her wit, her vivacity. It cannot bring back to us what Lord Orrery meant when he averred to Boaden that when she told a story even in ordinary conversation, and in spite of her stammer, "she absolutely painted while she spoke, and her language started into life." She was not, we may easily admit, one of those great ones who live entirely above and beyond the foibles and fashions of their time. From some points of view the record of Elizabeth Inchbald's life is all the more valuable on that account, for it touched the world around her at almost every point and at a particularly interesting time. A woman of genius, in her own particular way, she undoubtedly was. To have raised herself from being an obscure and uneducated farmer's daughter into becoming a universally

admired and beloved figure in the most intellectual society of her day, was an achievement in itself worthy of a better tribute from posterity than mere forgetfulness.

Even her virtues seem to mean more because they were not those of a rigid moralist, but of a consciously weak, consciously vain, intensely responsive and susceptible—and extremely beautiful—woman. There are two little sentences of hers more significant than many pages of laboured analysis. One is an entry in her diary at the time when she was at the height of her fame, and pursued by that host of lovers of whom we have heard something. After a night of glamour and gossip in the Covent Garden green-room, she writes: "Went home, worked, prayed, and thought purely." The other is a line in one of her last letters, when she had given up all her former gaieties, but could not forbear a momentary sigh over the vanished dream. "It is only," so her letter ran, "in the promises of the Gospel that I can ever hope to be young and beautiful again!"

With all her faults, she kept her lamp trimmed to the last; the flower of her beauty—of heart and mind, no less than of feature—unsmirched. She was a fragrant presence even in the midst of what was often an unspeakably foul and pestilential environment. Her sympathy was as unbounded as her generosity. With all the privations she imposed upon herself, she was never guilty of meanness to others. Of no one can it be said more truly that "the more she gave away the more she had." Whatever her struggles, whatever her temptations, she was a good woman as well as a charming one!

MRS INCHBALD'S BOOKS AND PLAYS

BOOKS

" A Simple Story."
First published in 1791, and ran immediately through several editions. Republished in Mrs Barbauld's " British Novelists," 1810; in " The British Novelist," 1823; in " Standard Novels," 1831. Later editions 1848, 1849, 1851, 1880 (with memoir by W. B. Scott); 1885 (with memoir by B. J.); 1908 (with introduction by J. L. Strachey). French translations 1793, 1834.

" Nature and Art."
First published 1796, second edition 1797. Republished in Mrs Barbauld's " British Novelists," 1810; in " The British Novelist," 1823; with *Simple Story* and memoir by W. B. Scott, 1880, as vol. 24 of " Cassell's National Library," 1886. French translation, 1797.

" The British Theatre."
Collection of plays, edited but not chosen by Mrs Inchbald, with biographical and critical remarks, 25 vols. Published 1806–9.

" The Modern Theatre."
Collection of plays, chosen by Mrs Inchbald, 10 vols. Published 1809.

" Collection of Farces and Afterpieces."
Chosen by Mrs Inchbald, 7 vols. Published 1809.

PLAYS

" The Mogul Tale."
Farce in two acts. Produced, Haymarket, 1784. First published 1796; republished 1824.

" I'll Tell You What."
Play in five acts. Produced, Haymarket, 1785. Published 1786. Translated into German 1792.

" APPEARANCE IS AGAINST THEM."
Farce. Produced, Covent Garden, 1785. Published 1785.

" THE WIDOW'S VOW."
Farce. Adapted from *L'Heureuse Erreur* of Patrat. Produced, Haymarket, 1786. Published 1786.

" ALL ON A SUMMER'S DAY."
Produced, Covent Garden, 1787. Not published.

" SUCH THINGS ARE."
Play in five acts. Produced, Covent Garden, 1787. First published 1788. 13 editions by 1805.

" THE MIDNIGHT HOUR."
Comedy translated from the French of Damaniant. Produced, Covent Garden, 1787. Published 1788.

" ANIMAL MAGNETISM."
Farce in three acts. Produced, Covent Garden, 1788 First published 1789. Second edition 1792. Republished 1824, 1827, 1829, 1834, 1858.

" THE CHILD OF NATURE."
Drama in four acts, translated from *Zélie* of Madame de Genlis. Produced, Covent Garden, 1788. First published 1788. Republished 1789, 1790, 1794, 1800.

" THE MARRIED MAN."
Comedy from *Le Philosophe Marié* of Destouches. Produced, Haymarket, 1789. Published 1789.

" HUE AND CRY."
Produced, Drury Lane, 1791, from the French. Not published.

" NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOURS."
Comedy in three acts, from *L'Indigent* of Mercier, and *Le Dissipateur* of Destouches. Produced, Haymarket, 1791. Published 1791.

" YOUNG MEN AND OLD WOMEN."
Comedy from the French. Produced, Haymarket, 1792. Not published.

" EVERYONE HAS HIS FAULT."
Comedy in four acts. Produced, Covent Garden, 1793. First published 1793. 7 editions by 1805.

" THE WEDDING DAY."
Comedy in two acts. Produced, Drury Lane, 1794. Published 1794.

" WIVES AS THEY WERE AND MAIDS AS THEY ARE."
Comedy in five acts. Produced, Covent Garden, 1797. First published 1797. 5 editions same year.

" LOVERS' VOWS."
Drama, altered from the German of Kotzebue. Produced, Covent Garden, 1798. Published 1798.

" WISE MEN OF THE EAST."
Drama, altered from the German of Kotzebue. Produced, Covent Garden, 1799. Published 1799.

" TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY."
Comedy in five acts. Produced, Covent Garden, 1805. Published 1805.

" THE MASSACRE " and " A CASE OF CONSCIENCE."
Never produced, but printed from her manuscripts by Boaden in his memoir, 1833.

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